



**Imagining/Queer/Anarchy:
Magic and Transformation**

IMAGINING / QUEER / ANARCHY: MAGIC AND TRANSFORMATION

"Once, I was a cop, a road warrior searching for a righteous cause
As the world fell, each, in our own way, was broken
It was hard to know who was more crazy: me or everyone else
Here they come again, worming their way into the black matter of my brain
I tell myself they cannot touch me; they are long dead
I am the one who runs from both the living and the dead
Hunted by scavengers, haunted by those I could not protect
So I exist in this Wasteland, a man reduced to a single instinct: SURVIVE!"
(Max's monologue at the beginning of *Mad Max: Fury Road*)

"... beyond all slavery and every dogma, we saw life dance free and naked."
(Renzo Novatore, *Toward the Creative Nothing*)

In the beginning was the fiction. And the fiction was God. The fiction was regarded as God. Fiction was God in the beginning. All that came to pass came to pass because of fiction and nothing came to pass that wasn't because of fiction. Yes, shit, whether material or ideal, was all just made up, whether the result of random, unexplainable (because non-rational) processes or... Actually, that's it.

The world adds up to what was made up. And what was made up about what was made up. Forever. So let's take a look here. What do we have?

Existential nihilism: the conclusion that life is pointless and meaningless.

Cosmic nihilism: the reality of the vast, entropically involved universe which makes our lives utterly insignificant (just like everything else, in fact).

Ethical nihilism: the consequence that there is no objective right and wrong and that morality is an insubstantial phantom, a spook haunting beings who are terrified of there being nothing to hold onto guiding their behaviour.

Epistemological nihilism: the realisation that we are in no intellectual position to be able to say that we either know or don't know anything in any ultimate or factual sense. We are simply adrift in a bubble of our own interpretation, fated to be constant problem solvers existing in pragmatic ways.

Political nihilism: the conviction that there can be no legitimate authorities over and above us. We are our own autonomous singularities, adrift with ourselves.

Some would say that there is a metaphysical nihilism too but I would say that if you cannot know that you know or don't know then there isn't much point in claiming that reality either is, or isn't, a certain way. Cos how the fuck do you know (or not know)?

Are there any questions? It turns out that if you put "nihilism" into the Google search box there are. I shall answer them personally as opposed to definitively:

Q: What is a nihilistic person?

A: Someone who proceeds on the basis of a radical absence of overarching authorities whether social, political or philosophical. Others might describe them as someone for whom nothing seems to matter.

Q: Who is a famous nihilist?

A: The most famous would be Friedrich Nietzsche.

Q: Can a nihilist be positive?

A: Very much so. Radical lack of meaning, for example, doesn't tell you how to feel about it or how to act in response to it. People can and do take this positively, in fact.

Q: Are depressed people nihilistic?

A: Not necessarily as a result of their depression. Depressed people may simply be sick or suffering. We should distinguish between illness and philosophical conviction or belief or positionality.

Q: Are nihilists happy?

A: Some are and some aren't.

Q: What makes a nihilist happy?

A: There is no general prescription. People are singularities not copies of each other.

Q: How do nihilists live?

A: In as many ways as there are nihilists.

Q: What are the dangers of nihilism?

A: That will depend on the philosophical and political positions from which you judge “danger”. From my position, nihilism’s dangers would only be dangers to those who want to hold power or enforce politics and culture upon people. And these latter things are things which should not be done.

Q: Can a nihilist love?

A: Yes. But only at the risk of experiencing its emptiness and ultimate futility.

Q: Are sociopaths nihilists?

A: Sociopaths are sociopaths. There is no necessary connection.

Q: Do nihilists fear death?

A: This one doesn’t.

Q: What is nihilism a symptom of?

A: Honesty and intelligence.

Q: How do you beat a nihilist?

A: You don’t because there’s no escaping the void.

Q: Do nihilists have hope?

A: Hope for what?

Q: Are nihilists rare?

A: Yes. And no.

Q: Do nihilists believe in an afterlife?

A: No. And yes.

Q: What is a real life example of nihilism?

A: The government of any nation on earth. People left like human trash to die under bridges. Your thinking that electronic entertainments are anything of substance.

Q: What do nihilists believe about death?

A: That it is an absolute end of cognisant existence as a singular entity.

Q: What is the motto of nihilism?

A: Shit happens.

Q: Do nihilists have feelings?

A: How could they not? Nihilists are humans.

Q: Is nihilism violent?

A: Not usually. Are Zionism, capitalism or authoritarianism violent? Are governments, police forces or mercenary armies violent?

Q: What is the opposite of nihilism?

A: Authoritarianism.

Q: Is nihilism self destructive?

A: Material reality is self-destructive (in a continual process of change). It needs no help from nihilism (even though we might wish to equate the two).

Q: Can you truly be a nihilist?

A: Why not?

Q: Why do people live nihilism?

A: Because they cannot help it.

Q: What is a famous quote about nihilism?

A: "A nihilist is not one who believes in nothing, but one who does not believe in what exists." (Albert Camus)

Q: What was Jean Paul Sartre's famous saying?

A: I assume this question assumes it is "Existence precedes essence" but that's existentialism not nihilism.

Q: Can nihilists be narcissistic?

A: Anyone can be narcissistic. Its not a specifically nihilist trait.

Q: Is nihilism a coping mechanism?

A: All thought is a coping mechanism because someone without a sense of who and where they were would quickly go mad (which is inability to cope).

Q: Is Buddhism a nihilism?

A: Some might say.

Q: What is an extreme form of nihilism?

A: How do we measure extremity? From whose position are we talking here?

Q: Is nihilism a delusion?

A: Isn't everything? Who sees unvarnished, unfiltered reality?

The equilibrium state of the cosmos is death, nothingness, complete inactivity. Behold the destination of everything.

My birth was an act of war.

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PART ONE: Imagining

I Want To Tell You A Story [10]

The Imaginative Task [143]

PART TWO: A Queer Apocalypse in the Wasteland

A. Mad Max [306]

B. V for Vendetta [429]

C. Conan the Barbarian [598]

D. V for Violence, L for Love [675]

E. Pirates: Violence, Love and *Joie de Vivre* in Watery Wastelands [732]

PART THREE: Green Queer Erotic Love Magic

Green [774]

Queer [788]

Erotic [818]

Love [824]

Magic [897]

I Want To Tell You A Story

1. Cosmic Thinking

What is “cosmic thinking”? Well, in simple terms, it is thinking set against the context of the cosmos, the universe, all that is, in its cold, dark, vastness.

What happens when you engage in such cosmic thinking? Well when I do all human thought, knowledge and fact begins to dissolve and deconstruct. Until there is nothing left. Against that vast, inscrutable, speechless background, what else would it do?

Things like meaning, value and what’s important, feelings and emotions, lose any sort of substance. As if they were really arbitrary, prejudicial, habitual or programmed, insular things that were just functions of an organism.

Human language, our means of understanding and making use of things as ideas, comes to seem as but a tool for conceptual manipulation for pre-determined and self-contained purposes.

Human thinking is recontextualised as fictions and stories told to give human beings impetus to live, reasons to exist, propulsion to move forward from day to day, a purpose.

Human beings themselves seem like random organisms come to being in the vastness of space with no real reason to believe that they are really anything but just more life.

All living things together are just surviving, coping.

Nihilism beckons us.

Welcome oblivion.

So what if nothing matters? What if meaning is imposed, local and contingent? What if all our thoughts and framings are empty, fictional and simply pragmatic? What if we are beings set free to be what we are to no ultimate end until our time, which is insignificant, runs out?

It would make the activity of attachment to things and ideas a particularly dubious one. It would mean attachment could only be to conditional and temporary things.

It would make our stories, narratives and explanations for things, our making sense, something else contingent and purposeful, simple works of imagination without any suggestion they “correspond to” or “represent” anything. Such ideas themselves would seem to become yet more empty linguistic ideas (for language is just coping). Our entire world would become imaginary and imagination perhaps our greatest, most valuable tool.

In none of this would anything be mandated by the cosmos, be the universe speaking for itself or be something required by the existence of things. Instead, self-organising organisms or the uninterested forces of the universe and the impetuses that are evident within it would just be doing what they do to no ultimate end but the end itself. And this idea of an end would just be one more empty fiction, another act of imagination.

Nihilism. Nihilism as thoroughgoing as that scientific story which tells us that the universe burst into existence in a “big bang” and has been entropically unfolding and devolving ever since. According to this story, a story of decay, it will continue to do so for trillions and trillions of years through aeons of time so vast we simply cannot conceive of them. The era of “life”, life in total, the temporal window for its existence, in this story will be miniscule. And, when all that is done, there will be nothing and it will all have happened for nothing. There was no meaning in the universe. Things just happened because they could. And when they had there was just nothing and no one to know it.

And yet we go on telling stories, making sense, imputing meanings, having values, creating “knowledge” and imagining facts. Can we escape it? Should we want to? What is the alternative? Where else would we go or what else would we be? We are what we are.

We are imagineers, we are beings that, through imagination, engineer worlds and ideas and relationships and meanings and values and languages so that we can live. We live in fiction and imagination and everything is literally made up, constructed, artificially and purposefully related together, filling our heads. Because if it wasn't there would, for us at least, just be a void. And who could live in that? Who could live with only a void of nothing to relate to? Of course, the consequence of what I am saying here is that we do live in that and that is all everything amounts to. *Nihilism is true*. But that's why we are what we are. By imagining otherwise, by imagining meanings and values and significances for feelings and emotions, by creating relationships we regard as valuable and important, we create safe spaces where, at least for the briefest of moments, we can live.

2. A Parable

Friedrich Nietzsche begins his 1873 essay "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense" with the following very short parable:

"In some remote corner of the universe, flickering in the light of the countless solar systems into which it had been poured, there was once a planet on which clever animals invented cognition. It was the most arrogant and most mendacious minute in the 'history of the world'; but a minute was all it was. After nature had drawn just a few more breaths the planet froze and the clever animals had to die."

Bearing in mind the Jesus of Nazareth seen in Mark's Gospel, chapter 4 (to which I will turn historically below), what is the meaning of this parable? In the rest of his opening paragraph to this essay Nietzsche lays out what he thinks it is:

1. Its an illustration of "just how pitiful, how insubstantial and transitory, how purposeless and arbitrary, the human intellect looks within nature."
2. It is indicating that "intellect has no further mission that might extend beyond the bounds of human life."
3. It is an argument that "cognition" causes the being that possesses it to overestimate their capabilities and their importance in general ("There is nothing in nature... that would not immediately swell up like a balloon from just one little puff of that force of cognition.")

The rest of Nietzsche's essay is simply footnotes to this parable and its extrapolation. In it, Nietzsche regards the human intellect and its primary medium, language, as mere pragmatic tools for coping with being alive. And he says that they are at their best not when they are right (a notion impossible to calculate) but when they are deliberately dissimulating (no doubt with what he references as our "proud, illusory consciousness"). Creative imagination is key, not an impossible and sterile "accuracy". Think on these things in what follows.

3. History

One of the ways we make meaning and create these safe spaces I mentioned at the end of my first section is called "history" and I want to dwell on that for a moment now. It so happens that, as a student, I studied a historical subject, that subject being biblical history, a subject based on actual historical documents and artefacts, the Jewish and Christian scriptures (amongst other things). So I have some acquaintance with the problems of history and with the questions of what history even is and is trying, or being claimed, to do. Twenty five years ago almost to the day as I am writing this, in fact, I began a PhD that was about a "historical" character – one you will probably best know as Jesus of Nazareth. For some of the 25 years since then I have written a considerable amount of text about the historical sources for this character and what they say about him (obviously where some of the apparent claims seem hardly historically credible at all). The best of this writing over two decades (according to my judgment), about 800 pages, I collected together recently into a book titled *The Posthistorical Jesus Reader*, an exercise I undertook in order to examine what I personally had been writing about Jesus, both as and not as a historical character. Having done that and analysed the final product, it stuck

out to me that probably the most oft used words in that text that weren't obvious words like "the", "of", "at", etc., or "Jesus" itself, were the following words:

Fiction

Imagination

Interpretation

Rhetoric

Meaning

On the basis of this realisation I came up with the following definition of "history":

"An interpretive and imaginative narrative, composed with rhetorical force, and articulated as a fiction of the past, that is, fundamentally, about the meaning (a present concern) it conveys." Or, "That which people write about the past as a meaningful narrative, as connections of events, and as historicised, rhetorical story to mean something to people now."

Now that is certainly the case, in my view, with the character I was specifically interested in as a postgraduate student doing academic work (and beyond) on his history and how that history has been preserved and subsequently written about. Interpretations, and imaginative narratives, that articulate fictional pasts about and for Jesus abound. And they are most obviously written to convey present meaning to their readers. But how does that stand up when compared to the analyses of historians and theorists of history itself? Let's examine this question more generally.

A very interesting and thoughtful book on the subject of history is Keith Jenkins and Alun Munslow's *The Nature of History Reader* from 2004. Although it could easily be partisan, and although its editors clearly have their own views about history, and what it is and isn't, that are clearly put in a more detailed and thorough way in books of their own, this book is a collection of views on history put into categories by these two editors so that the reader can find all in one place a number of views, from multiple angles, which explain history, what it is, and what it is and isn't doing, in different ways. Some of the writers quoted believe in history (as a factual record of the past, a potential historical metanarrative, we might say) very strongly. Others wouldn't care if history disappeared (as, in fact, in real time, it is doing all the time). Yet others think of history as little other than interpretive narratives about the past (essentially stories with historical settings). Consequently, the four sections to this book are "reconstructionism", "constructionism", "deconstructionism" and "endisms" – dependent on whether the editors think the authors they are excerpting regard history as remaking the past as it happened, as constructing a past against some imagined measure that was "the past", as acts of interpretive imagination or as something that is passing, and should pass, away.

Our editors, in their introduction to the volume, consequently speak about "positionings" in a narrative which concerns 1960s intellectual developments in continental European philosophy which changed how people thought about history generally. (Here, as will be seen, the word "history" itself is problematic in English usage given that it can equally refer to an imagined past, a "chain of events" that, so we presume to think, unrolled as it did, but also to recitations of the past, oral or literary or by other means, which imagine to present it intelligibly and realistically to the reader or listener – and perhaps on the basis that there was some past, as in the first sense here, by which it could, at least in theory, be measured.) The phenomena Jenkins and Munslow refer to most generally are found

with the prefix “post” before them (poststructuralism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, etc.) and it consequently often seems the case that how you regard, or interact, with these things, and things like them, will determine your approach to history. Here the broad movement plotted by our editorial guides is one going away from history as an empirical, epistemological thing and towards... something else.

In other words, the idea here is of an awakening from old fashioned notions of history as the result of scientific, objective and empirical methods which deliver a “demonstrable knowledge” of that particular imaginary phenomenon known as “the past”. That belief, say Jenkins and Munslow, has, in the past half century or more, been “rendered problematic”. This, in postmodern guise, might be seen as a movement concurrent with the one Jean-Francois Lyotard describes as “incredulity towards metanarratives” as an aspect of “the postmodern condition”. One way to then put this problematic in question form might be to ask if history, in my second sense above, is then a “record” of the past or a “historicising” of the past – or something else entirely. As we can see here in and through all of this, “history” is, as a result, put in question.

An important waypoint here is pointing the finger at the notion, held, according to our editorial guides, by historians of the reconstructionist or constructionist type, that “history is written by the past itself”. This is “the past” thought of as authority, as something sovereign, as “the measure”. But it also thinks of the human author as having no “interpretive bulk” of their own – as if “the past” turns into “history”, with them as “medium”, but without anything of they themselves ever becoming mixed up in it. Our editors, however, say:

"Any text, including this one, stakes out a claim, is inevitably intertextual and partial/partisan, and thus an engagement which is unavoidably polemical, for it is impossible today – in fact, strictly speaking it may always have been 'logically' impossible – to write in any other way."

Consequently, these editors, who seem to subsequently argue that all is "polemic", set out their own position on "history" and "the past" as well:

*"We are anti-post-empiricists because we think that the historicising of the past (the turning of what seems to have happened 'before now' into something the 'before now' never actually was – an article, a film, a book, a conference paper – a history), is as much a linguistic undertaking (and especially a narrativisation, an aestheticising and thus a figurative undertaking) as it is an empirical one. **To turn (to trope) something that isn't in the form of a narrative** – all that has gone on before everywhere – **into a narrative** (that is, into a linguistic convention, a literary mode of structuration, a genre) **is just an act of the imagination**. And this imaginative, constitutive element gives history qua history the unavoidable status of being fictive. Not, let us note immediately, the status of being a piece of fiction – for in fiction the imagined goes 'all the way down' – but fictive in the sense of fictio; that is to say, made up, fashioned, created, fabricated, figured. We thus take it as read that histories as such are aesthetic, figurative productions which, while they contain what can be called facts (and which indeed refer, indirectly, via the mediations of a performative language use, to the traces of aspects of a once actuality) are, nevertheless, always more than the sum of their factual/cognitive parts: a sum total that can never actually be total. And this 'fact' – the fact that histories are irreducible to 'the facts' and thus knowledge closures; the fact that histories always contain acts of the creative imagination – means that histories are impossible to close down, because **it is impossible***

to close down the imagination. This openness of the 'before now' to interminable appropriation is further guaranteed on two counts. First, because the 'before now' doesn't have in it a shape of its own, because the 'before now' doesn't have in it 'events' that have, as it were, the shape of narratives, there is nothing against which we can check out our imagined narrative orderings to see if they 'correspond', for there is literally nothing for them to correspond to. Consequently, although objectivity and truth might well operate at the level of the statement in so far as it demonstrably corresponds to a singular piece of 'evidence', no such correspondence can ever be achieved at the level of the text, at the level of a history (and histories are always 'at the level of the text'). Second, all (further) attempts to effect some kind of closure by reference to context – historians are always talking about 'putting things into context' – is also impossible epistemologically because no 'context' is ever exhaustive: you can always get another context, always get another (arbitrary) set of circumstances. Consequently, because new contexts are always – in principle and in practice – open to future recontextualisation *ad infinitum*, so the 'before now' is too. In that sense, while the past is literally behind us, histories are always 'to come'; in other words, the before now is always unstable 'historically' because history cannot, in that sense, die. (This is not to say, incidentally, that we cannot come to the end of history in the sense that the whole discourse of history could become obsolete, forgotten; rather, it is to say that, in so far as the 'before now' remains as something that is 'historically' considered, then logically what that consideration results in is never final, never definitive.)

For us this inability ever to secure what are effectively interpretive closures – the continuing *raison d'être* of the vast bulk of the historical profession in even these pluralist days – is not only logically impossible, but politically and ethically/morally desirable. The fact that the 'before now', both as a whole and in its parts, is so very obviously underdetermining *vis-à-vis*

its innumerable appropriations (one past, an infinity of histories) is to be both celebrated and worked." (emphases mine)

The three bedrock claims here, with which I agree and upon which I will extrapolate shortly when coming back to my own personal historical experience, are that:

1. History is fiction.
2. There is nothing in the past for histories to correspond to, no "original story", no inherent or internal structure, no implicit "events".
3. History is constructed by means of imagination, it is conjured – and it can always be reimagined or reconjured.

Historians can, thus, "never get things right" (something about which Jenkins and Munslow are profoundly happy) and, if they imagine to bring forth representations (read: re-presentations) of the past, then THEY ALWAYS FAIL. This, it also seems to me, seems to question that histories are epistemological phenomena at all due to their form. (A story, a narrative, an aesthetic product, can impart rhetorical knowledge and truth, etc., but it can't *be* either knowledge or truth [which are just words anyway].) Jenkins and Munslow parse this for themselves with reference to Jacques Derrida's phrase "a certain appearance in its favour" (speaking about history as history) which is taken from his essay "Deconstructions: The Im-possible" which appears in the deconstructionism section of their book. Their point appears to be that presenting histories in a "historical mode" allows a "history effect" to be consequently achieved. This is perhaps then suggestive of why the story form is chosen since it is excellent at introducing people to imaginary worlds. And the point here is very much that histories ARE imaginary worlds.

Consequently, the approach of Jenkins and Munslow in their book is one of “structurings”, being led forward by the historical theorist Hayden White (who also has work included in the book). They take White’s view on history to be that it is “a narrative prose discourse the content of which is as much imagined (the modes of troping, emplotting, arguing) as found (the ‘facts’, etc.)”. We might think of this description in an archaeological sense: archaeologists may find various things at a site but they then have to imagine (for they were not there 5,000 years ago, or whenever, so what else can they do?) how all the bits and pieces they find fit together to create what they IMAGINE to be a historical scene, i.e. a scene that can carry the weight of historical credibility as that is judged, at a distance and in another context, in the present. (Of course, that this might bear no resemblance to an actual past as it occurred should be obvious. BUT THIS IS NEVER ON THE TABLE ANYWAY. There is no original, actual or objective measure against which to judge modern historical presentations which can, consequently, neither be said to re-present nor to correspond.)

Thus, our editors remark that “history in general is constituted by the compulsions of empirical data *and* language” and it is this fact which allows and authorises their constructional scheme in organising the readings on history in their book. Arguing themselves that history is a “narrative space”, they continue that:

“The question, therefore, is not what mode or specific form of history do you write, but what genre do you choose to work within? It is the answer to that question which determines the meanings it is possible to generate.”

History is not just some naive, non-ideological lump then, a self-presenting, self-interpreting fact-as-narrative. How one writes, one’s presuppositions about what one is

doing in the act of historical imagination, set the products of such acts down a particular path (the three major ones our authors divine being exactly the reconstructive, constructive and deconstructive paths). Jenkins and Munslow consequently speak of “author-historians” in order to emphasise history’s compositional nature and how acts of configuration/prefiguration are integral to the effects they produce. As a result, they conclude that:

“the historian domesticates ‘the past as history’ by offering her/his own particular narrative form of explanation – i.e. their preferred notion of what constitutes the ‘proper’ way to gain historical knowledge and, most importantly, generate historical meaning.”

This is the important thing, in fact, and leads to numerous questions. Can we, for example, as historians, as some people excerpted in the “reconstruction” part of this book think, speak realistically to the intentions of past historical actors in worlds even just imaginably wholly different to our own? Whether you are reconstructionist, constructionist or deconstructionist about history makes a difference in how you might answer that question for some will think it the point and others will think it is either delusional fantasy or imaginative flight of fancy. If we imagine that history is “constrained by reality” isn’t it also true that, in its recitation by modern others, it is “narrated in order to create an explanation with an emplotment”? But is history a matter of explanations and is it emplotted? If a historical fact can be true, can a historical narrative? (Bonus question: what would “true” here mean anyway?) How might one theorise the notion that a given history can either be wrong or right – and wouldn’t that need some standard or measure? What could that possibly be given that no one called a historian was, by definition, there at the time of the things they discuss? How might we counter the spectre – if indeed it even is a spectre – that “History is primarily the figural, narrative

creation of the historian in the present”? What would that make “history”? What would you say to the notion, which our editors ascribe to the Dutch historical theorist Frank Ankersmit, that “facts [are] essentially events under a description (how else can we know them except when we describe them?), but [that] all the historical interpretations built upon them exist only in relation to other interpretations”? The fact something happened, even if we can say it happened, does not entail that we can know, or understand, what it meant in its context – even if we imagine (in error) that that context was singular.

But isn't history more than “saying what happened” anyway? How, for example, could we know the values or thoughts of people 8,000 years ago – and if we don't know them how can we then pretend to explain their lives or how things were among them? Here the deconstructive path Jenkins and Munslow set out “doubts that empiricism and language are adequate to the task of representation of ‘reality’ at a fundamentally truthful level when the aim is the recovery of what it actually means.” How do you feel about that? How do you feel about the further claim, raised amongst the “endisms” of the last part of this book, that:

“from the facts of the past, the syntax of the past, no value, no semantics are entailed: you can read the past, in its parts or its putative whole, any way you like. No necessary meaning, no necessary significance, no necessary emplotment follows; or, to put it this way, ‘nothing (necessarily) follows.’”?

What if it be decided that no one can know what the past meant and so that no one can decide what it means? What if the past is just sand slipping through our collective fingers, that which you cannot grasp or hold on to? What if it all just turns out to be imagination and “history effects”? WHAT IF NOTHING EPISTEMOLOGICAL IS GOING ON HERE AT ALL?

I find all this mightily interesting, not least in that my own life history gave me an interest in Jesus of Nazareth as a historical character, one I pursued both academically and in not inconsiderable portions of my own private research. The most recent product of this is an 800 page, 250,000 word book on the subject which I compiled from my past efforts, extending back ultimately over 25 years, entitled *The Posthistorical Jesus Reader: Personal Reflections on the Historical Jesus, Historical Jesus Fictions and the Practice of Interpretation*. There are, for example, multiple pieces in this book which address the historical figure Jesus “as text” or “as an art” or as something to be “deconstructed” or “remembered” or “in hermeneutic context” or as a subject of “interpretation”. In this book I talk about Jesus as a subject of “gospel rhetorics” – for there is surely more than one gospel and they don’t all have the same rhetoric – as well as occasional chapters which actually discuss the mechanics and purposes of certain episodes of Jesus’ putative historical reality. A good example here is my sixth chapter which discusses the gospel narratives of the death, burial and resurrection (all three parts matter here) of Jesus. Even if we think all these events occurred, what could possibly be the truth of making a narrative out of them (not least when there are also others which differ from yours)? Perhaps this was why my fifth chapter had discussed the gospels *as literature* in an attempt to bring literary purposes and devices to light in the construction of these narratives? This is to say that, whatever Jesus’ historical reality and purpose was, it was surely neither exactly the same as those who wrote about this person nor simply passed on uncontaminated and pristine. Another way to put this is as the biblical scholar, and eminent participant in debates about the historical Jesus, John Dominic Crossan once did in this question: Isn’t four gospels three too many?

The history of Jesus as an expressly historical subject is instructive and also a subject that is subject to a history of its own. This subject was set out for all time by the scholar and

humanitarian Albert Schweitzer in his 1906 book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* which set out how Jesus, as an expressly historical subject, came to be a person of interest in the 1770s when Hermann Samuel Reimarus (in secret since Jesus was, and in some places, remains, a cultural figure of some significance and consequence – not least if one should say the wrong things about him) discerned a difference between the character found in historical documents produced by adherents to the Christian faith (primarily the four canonical gospels) and what he imagined to be a more historical depiction of first century Roman Palestinian reality. This, according to Schweitzer at least, was the first consequential attempt to separate the historical actuality of Jesus in a putative past from the literary products of those who made narratives about this character and his past. This would lead to academic industry (and controversy) either widening or attempting to narrow (or belittle) this divide that goes on in an unbroken line from then up until the present day (for the genie is very much out of this particular bottle). That is why you can get former students like me who take PhDs on the subject of a Jesus who is a collection of literary fictions and interpretive “remembrances” who can separate out “Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean” from “the religious figure, Jesus Christ”. This, in fact, concerns the title of one of my shortest, but most to the point, essays on the subject which, for instructive purposes, I will reproduce for you now:

“Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean” and “the religious figure, Jesus Christ”

The American comedian, Rich Hall, had a show in 2009 called “Hell No, I Ain’t Happy”. I mention it because, hell no, I ain’t happy. In fact, I find it hard to believe I’ll ever be happy and, up until this point at which, as I write, I am approaching the age of one half century old, I never have been happy as a settled state. I’ve been concentrating on trying to stay

sane although I'm not sure why as being insane would at least relieve me of the burden of being concerned about it either way. In fact, were it not for brief moments of happiness that had strayed way off course and found themselves populating my hellhole of an existence, I would easily be able to believe that happiness is a myth told to keep us compliant and hopeful.

The British comedian, Stewart Lee, likes to play a character on stage that he refers to in mock interviews and real ones as "the comedian Stewart Lee" and this character is a version of Stewart Lee himself yet, in Lee's mind, at least, a rhetorically distinguishable version. This version of Lee does comedy exclusively for "an insular cadre of socially challenged, middle aged men" although, as Lee notes as part of his act, to laughter, not as exclusively as he'd like. Indeed, in a more recent show than the one from which this anecdote is taken, the comedian Stewart Lee goes on to say that his ideal room is a completely sold out empty room. He's got the money, because people have bought the tickets, but he doesn't have to do the work of bringing them round or appealing to their comedic sensitivities.

I wonder how the American comedian, Louis CK, feels about this. CK is now most famous for deciding it would be a good idea to masturbate in front of women, sometimes asking permission and sometimes not. It seems it never occurred to him to say that it was "the comedian Louis CK" doing these things. As I write, he recently made what is being reported as a come back appearance at a New York comedy venue only for lots of women to complain in public on the Internet that the disgraced Mexican-American should actually have just disappeared forever. These women, it seems, do not believe that CK has yet suffered enough for the crime of exposing a few inches of flesh in the wrong circumstances. The thought begins to dawn on me that, perhaps, they wish he would just

go and hide in a corner and, to all intents and purposes, cease to exist as a public individual.

One wonders how the fourth century BCE Cynic, Diogenes of Sinope, would feel about this. Diogenes, so we learn from historical anecdotes, would masturbate openly in public and then remark that he wished it was so easy to fulfill the desire of hunger as it was to fulfill the sexual desire. A little rub and its gone away until next time. Yet Diogenes would be in jail if he were here today, a pariah and a target of outraged feminist critique, and all because he was dealing as simply as possible with the sexual urge where someone else might see it. But what else could he do, masturbate furiously in his barrel? Diogenes, of course, might have replied to the effect that it is no big deal. Sex is natural and not shameful. Seeing an animal ejaculate is nothing to be frightened of or outraged about just like when your dog licks its embarrassing erection yet, strangely, does not appear remotely embarrassed. At best, it is perhaps something to laugh at, dismissively. Diogenes was a Cynic which means that he thought nothing natural could be a source of shame. His enemy was cultural prescription, the artificiality of human beings who codify and make rules for things that take human society away from living “according to nature” in general.

And now, in my fifth paragraph, I come to my fifth man. That man is Jesus, alternatively known as Christ, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Lord, Jesus of Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus H Christ and Jesus, the carpenter’s son. There is no record of the King of Kings ever having masturbated in public, although it seems he did get heckled from time to time, and there is that one saying about chopping your balls off if you are up to it (check Matthew 19:10-12 if you aren’t wise to this). Yet he did not speak about “the religious figure, Jesus Christ” and neither did he ever say he was happy. But this, it turns out, is not

something he could have done anyway because Jesus was not a writer. He did not write and perhaps, most likely, could not have written if he had wanted to anyway. Jesus was almost certainly illiterate. When we bring together the notions of Jesus and writing it is always someone else's writing about Jesus and never Jesus' writing about Jesus. Jesus, most likely, did not have the ability or the will to present himself in writing and so it was left up to others, often people Jesus didn't even know, to write about him instead. Which of us would be happy with that? The religious figure, Jesus Christ, might be happy with that. He has gone on to have the biggest career of all time. But what about Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean?

It strikes me that Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean might be mortified by the career that the religious figure, Jesus Christ, is having. He would, it seems to me, more than likely be banging his head against the wall of his carpenter's shop shouting "Make it stop!" if it weren't for the unfortunate fact that he is dead. Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean, did not ask to be brought into the White House, the seat of American presidential power, and used as a totem or a proxy for policies of any kind of modern partisanship. Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean, did not share some bread and fish with some people so that guys wearing pillow cases on their heads could express their hatred for Jews and blacks. Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean was a Jew (and, in all likelihood, not exactly white), unlike the religious figure, Jesus Christ, who was a white, European-looking fellow and so obviously not a Jew. The religious figure, Jesus Christ, was more the Jesus who would be happy to be at a right wing rally where the supremacy of the white race could be reasonably discussed and promulgated. As the whitest person in history, the religious figure, Jesus Christ, fits right in there. But not Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean. Stupid Jew. Literally.

Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean was not a modern, white, evangelical businessman. He did not have family values. Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean said, "The person who does not hate father and mother cannot become a disciple of mine." He also said, "If you have money, do not give it at interest. Instead, give it to someone from whom you won't get it back." He said that people have nowhere to lay their heads and that people should "Become passersby". Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean was fucking insane. He would not have been accepted into your cosy, well-funded church on Sunday. He would have been chased from the door had he even showed up. He had literally nothing to say about homosexuality, abortion clinics or making America great, either again or at all. He would wonder why there were bishops who had thrones in cathedrals and lived in palaces. But not the religious figure, Jesus Christ. He gets that. In fact, he wants you to hang his portrait up in the palace and have a statue of him in the cathedral. And please use his name as much as possible to justify whatever it is you want to do today. Even if its genocide.

At this point I should apologise to any female readers because, even though Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean may have recommended chopping off your balls for the kingdom of God, he was still a man. Very much a man. You don't see any female carpenters now do you? And the religious figure, Jesus Christ, is basically a huge, shiny penis being waved in your face, Louis CK stylee. The religious figure, Jesus Christ, is the very appendage of life. He wants you to eat him. He insists. So this is a very man-centred essay about a very manly subject. God is not a woman, OK? That's just a fact you'll have to get used to down at the Women's Rights Centre as you discuss the tax on tampons and misogyny in the computer games industry. So, ladies, if you please, the men are talking about men here. It would serve you well to watch, listen, learn and, fundamentally, know your place. Oh, I know that some churches have female priests and

even bishops now but, come on, all the proper churches don't, the ones that actually have eaten the big, shiny dick of the religious figure, Jesus Christ.

Now Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean, was a poor man. I mean really poor. Destitute, in fact. And he really disliked people who weren't poor. He would have hated rich men in suits crowdfunding their campaigns to be congressmen and senators whilst greedily snuffling at the trough of corporate endorsement. (You may wonder why I keep referring this essay to American things when I am British but this is obviously because America is the most important country in the world in every respect.... For those reading this who are unaware of the British comedian, Stewart Lee, I don't think that. I think the opposite of that.) He would have despised CEOs of multi-national companies outsourcing their work to some third world cesspool where people work knee deep in their own excrement for 22 hours a day, not allowed to even go and relieve themselves elsewhere because it might slow down production and reduce the profit margin by 0.00000000000001%. So, this being true, isn't it somewhat perverse that the religious figure, Jesus Christ, is exactly a friend of all the slimy sons of bitches that Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean never would be? How the hell did that happen?

It turns out that this is what happens when Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean does not write his own PR material. Then what happens is that bozos turn up later who don't particularly see the advantages of Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean, who likes the poor and encourages everyone else to become it by giving all their money away, but do see the advantages of someone called the religious figure, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, as British motoring buffoon, Jeremy Clarkson, likes to call himself (shouldn't that be "JC"?), is many times more preferable because, since he never actually ever existed, much like "the comedian, Stewart Lee," you can actually say

pretty much anything you like about him. He is what feminists like to call “a rhetorical construct” and so is very much like “toxic masculinity”. The best thing about being a rhetorical construct is that you can get away with saying anything because you will always be able to fall back on the notion that what you are talking about never really existed. Of course, you should never actually say that because the whole point of the religious figure, Jesus Christ, is that you maintain to the utmost of your ability that he does exist. But, of course, he doesn't really. Just never say that out loud.

All this would have flown over the head of Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean though. He was not up on feminist discourse. He wasn't interested in corporate endorsements. He couldn't even write his own name. And he didn't want to. He just got his hammer and chisel and chopped at bits of wood. Sometimes he wandered about and ate food with people. Like a mug. He talked about the kingdom of God and said it was like a weed that infests your garden and draws in birds who will eat all your seed. Then he said it was like mould you put in bread that infects all the bread and makes it rise. Was he off his nut? What is this gibberish? No wonder you never find his picture in palaces or his statue in cathedrals. The religious figure, Jesus Christ, is much more suitable to the task of being our cultural battering ram for all the things that we think but that we can say that he really stood for. Rhetorical construct, remember that.

The religious figure, Jesus Christ, does not mind this because he gets a throne at God's right hand and he appreciates that kinda thing. Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean, said he had nowhere to lay his head and, apparently, wandered about the countryside like some kind of tramp. That message will not play well with the upwardly mobile demographic that we are aiming for as they try to not default on their mortgages and upgrade to the next model of car whilst saving for the newest iPhone. We do not

want people to find nobility and blessing in their pathetic lives, much less meaning. We want them to imagine that they can have something better... but not right now. After death. Right now you have to give us all of your money and suffer. Suffering is good. Look, the religious figure, Jesus Christ, suffered. He was crucified, for God's sake. (Yes, literally.) But he has a throne now. Geddit? Suffer now, throne later. Right now you have to hate homos, baby killers, people who vote left, cross-dressing sex perverts and anyone who hasn't got a gun. Its what the religious figure, Jesus Christ, would have wanted. You know he's in charge upstairs, right? How do you think things will work out for you if you get there and you have all the wrong views? "No one comes to the Father except through me," OK?

So forget this dope Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean. Forget the poor. Forget giving all your money away, hating mom and dad, loving your enemies, being merciful, not judging, taking the log out of your own eye, and that parable where the king invites everyone to the banquet, "both good and bad alike". As if! That is all terrible stuff, literally the opposite of the good life in today's world. If you want a good life then you need the religious figure, Jesus Christ. He hates immoral people and is going to burn them all... and you need never look in the mirror with him. He only bothers about the bad people and not us good ones. And remember, Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean was a vagrant and can you trust vagrants? No, you can't. We arrest vagrants. Just for being vagrants! Vagrants are morally culpable simply for their vagrancy which is a kind of social marker for immorality. Any decent person has their own home. Diogenes was a vagrant and he masturbated in public. Like Louis CK. But the religious figure, Jesus Christ, never once so much as touched his own penis. In fact, he was asexual. Never had a single sexual thought. His mind was pure. He never even had an erection because he was too busy thinking about being good and burning the immoral who have far too many

erections. And that's just the feminist lesbians! So would you really choose Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean over the religious figure, Jesus Christ? Its your ass on the line here.

You never realised all this was at stake really, did you? But there is a reason that God speaks through the religious figure, Jesus Christ, and not the leftist conspiracy fabrication that is Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean. That reason is that God has moral values. God, who is white, knows the value and righteousness of good, white values, of making money, looking after yourself, your family and friends to the detriment of all others whilst bearing arms as a God-given right. That's why we know that the Jews who killed Jesus are not going to heaven, because the religious figure, Jesus Christ, says so. Remember, the religious figure, Jesus Christ, is alive. He rose from the dead on the third day just like the four holy gospels (which were written by four trustworthy white men) say. But this Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean, he died. He died like a dog on a cross and no one knows what they did to him. Probably eaten by dogs or dumped in a pile of bodies with his face in someone's ass. Do you want to be associated with that? Do you want to follow assface and wonder around like a tramp spouting parables about seeds or do you want a throne in heaven whilst all the bad people get the hellfire they deserve?

Hell no, you ain't happy now, are you? Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean isn't looking so good now. He's almost a masturbator, that vagrant bastard. You can't trust anyone who hasn't got a home, right? They are dangerous. Their vagrancy might be catching. Do you know, he even advised his followers to go knocking on doors so that they might get food? This is why the religious figure, Jesus Christ, asks us to live in gated communities so that we can keep scum like that out. You never know where the hand that

knocks on your door might have been. Best to see them stopped at the gate. By the security guard. Let them wipe the dust from their feet. See if I care. We don't need your fake news kingdom of God communist Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean. The religious figure, Jesus Christ, who is white unlike you, has our thrones ready for us in heaven. Which is also white. What's that? "Everyone who glorifies himself will be humiliated, and the one who humbles himself will be praised?" Listen, Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean. I am white, the religious figure, Jesus Christ, is white and God is white. If you think I'm living like a tramp in the dirt, relying on whatever I can find to eat and mixing with those who can, at best, be described as immoral undesirables, then you are very much mistaken.

Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean made a mistake. He left his PR to other people and now other people prefer the religious figure, Jesus Christ. Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean is now fake news, a commie Christ, a socialist masturbator's wet dream, woke nonsense. Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean wishes now that he had learnt to write as he lies, mouldering, in an unmarked grave with his denuded face in someone's bony ass. He cannot believe that he left the job to the four white guys, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They seemed trustworthy at the time but instead of repeating what he said they made up stories and sexed it up until they had the religious figure, Jesus Christ, instead. Weren't they listening? Which bit of "blessed are the poor" did they not get? Instead, they went with the whole "son of God" angle as if Jesus was a white guy, the boss man. They went chasing after Roman approval as if pleasing those in charge was what mattered most. Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean never said that big organisations should be created with people living in palaces. He never endorsed telethons to fund churches or expected the pastor to live in a mansion. Which bit of "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your

servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must become slave of all” did they not get? Jesus of Nazareth, the destitute, illiterate Galilean hunkered down in his unmarked grave, depressed. He wished he had learnt to write.

What you learn about history from this piece on the historical Jesus, as from all my own scholarship on the subject, such as it is, is pretty much what you learn about history from Jenkins and Munslow in the introduction to their book discussing history generally, i.e. that history is fiction, that there is no “original” which can be corresponded to or “represented”, and that its all a matter of imagination. To briefly illustrate:

A. The gospels of the New Testament, without much argument being regarded as the best historical sources for the character Jesus, are clearly fictions that create a narrative space for the character set in fictional time and space. The authors – whoever they were for no one actually knows – were almost certainly people at a remove from the events they (putting it charitably) recount and we have no reason to believe they had any knowledge of orders of events nor their internal (or even external, ostensible) motivations. When they narrate events such as Jesus praying alone before his arrest we cannot reasonably imagine they report documented speech nor realistically make it integral to events. But the gospels do for they are creative fictions imagining what they would like to be true rather than saying “what actually happened” (something, we will soon explain, it is hard to realistically imagine being able to do anyway). This, by the by, does not mean that we can then go in, take the imaginatively constructed narratives apart, and substitute alternate ones instead. It simply means fiction is all we have.

B. Consequently, there is no “original Jesus” to find in history. But there couldn’t be anyway. Even if Jesus had written a gospel himself (which is unlikely as it is highly

probable that he, like almost everyone in his time and place, was illiterate) it would only amount to Jesus' own interpretation of himself. This would not necessarily be anymore "true" or "false" than anyone else's interpretation of him in terms of his meaning and purpose. Would we trust a Donald Trump history of Donald Trump or a Boris Johnson history of Boris Johnson? We wouldn't. Were we writing histories of these people we would certainly want different interpretations of the events in which they were involved from those who were direct witnesses to, or participants of, said events. We would be dubious of them "speaking for themselves" as if they had the last words on the inherent meaning of things or as if things "speak for themselves". Here the historical point to make is that things, not least in their connections and interactions, and like reality, NEVER speak for themselves but, rather, are always SPOKEN FOR.

This is just another way of saying that history is a matter of interpretation ALL THE WAY DOWN. You never hit a historical, original, indisputable, neutral bedrock description of historical events or their meaning exactly because things are always spoken for by others (who always have partialities) by means of descriptions. These descriptions can themselves be described as true or false, likely or unlikely, reasonable or unreasonable, on the basis of rhetorical arguments that are mounted in discursive contexts but they are never an original, non-discursive articulation of historical truth, an unquestionable, self-generating veracity. History is a matter of interpretations, and only interpretations, that are adjudicated in disciplinary fashion (i.e. according to the currently imagined criteria for their plausibility) by socialised audiences (i.e. by those who have social standards for assessing historical truth and meaning). In other words, all the "history" we ever find is the currently most acceptable description of events (relative to an imagined audience) that is set in a past.

C. Nothing I have said in points A+B here, you will note, has made it formally impossible that any and, indeed, all of this could be simply imaginary. What is “historically plausible” (not least about the historical character Jesus) can quite easily be a matter of pure imagination for not only are we both judge and jury but, with no original to find, there is also no purely historical measure (a measure set purely and only in the past) either.

This point can be further nuanced by the philosophical observation that history does not, in fact, consist of “truths” or “events” or “meanings” but that, instead, these are things historians, or the historically interested, look to manufacture from it. This is then purely an imaginative act for even should we, in some way and measured somehow, match up to some historical actor’s assessment of things, so what? As we noted in the previous point, this would still not be the inherent, actual or original meaning of events nor even a record of their inherent mechanics. Such a meaning is imagination, an intellectual postulate that has a role in so-called human understanding processes. It is not a part of the history nor even of any actuality as it takes place. Things don’t happen for static reasons with static meanings as a set of static events, they just happen. The “for reasons” or “with meanings” or “as events” is there a set of human additions in order to satisfy human intellectuality as it has developed and to provide historical descriptions.

Human beings, that is, are imagining reasons and meanings and events (and using their historically funded values in order to judge them) as part of their human process of making them into sensible things – an imaginative process. Not only is history, as a constructed narrative, then an imaginative act but imagining something called “the past” as something that can be turned into “history” is also an imaginative act. Without imagination history would be impossible for history is an imaginative act.

4. A World of Fiction and Imagination

This being so, it would seem sensible to now dip into the subjects of fiction and imagination and I can imagine no better place to look than in the works of Alan Moore, which evince a lifetime's fascination with, and use of, both of these things, and the films of Terry Gilliam which demonstrate the same obsessions in and through his films. (Here I note that the collaboration of Moore and Gilliam might once have been a possibility, a very intriguing prospect, when Gilliam was once, in the 1990s, mooted as a possible director of a filmed version of *Watchmen*. They, in fact, met for a meal to discuss it but, as Moore tells the story, Gilliam asked him how he would make a film of *Watchmen* and Moore, as is his way, said that he wouldn't. They then went on to discuss other things over their meal which Moore describes as much more interesting.)

Let me begin, then, with Alan Moore, possibly Northampton's premier Magus. Moore became famous, in the 80s and since, as the award winning and implicitly imaginative writer of comic book stories from *V for Vendetta*, *Watchmen* and *From Hell* (a comic book about Jack the Ripper which became a psycho-geographical exploration of London, amongst other things) to *Promethea*, *Lost Girls* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. His writing, in depth and scale, is extraordinary and his research is second to none. (*From Hell*, Moore has argued, is the most thorough research into the Ripper murders ever undertaken by anyone, let alone a comics writer.) Indeed, so imaginative is Moore in his ideas and their extrapolation into books that he has often found himself out of sync with his rapacious publishers (not least DC Comics) such that such relationships suffered a terminal breach which led to Moore disowning many of his better known works since DC owned the copyright to them. Moore finally left the comics industry several years ago now at time of writing but it seems that he has turned his hand to narrative

stories just as easily, the narrative behemoth *Jerusalem*, a multi-layered, multi-time, story about one section of his home town of Northampton, being a 615,000 word example of his industry that took ten years to complete. But it would possibly not ever have been begun were it not for the fact that in November 1993 Moore declared himself henceforth a magician at his drunken fortieth birthday party. This would lead to him overtly developing the philosophy that is of interest to me here in my context.

I recently took delivery, as I write this to you now, of Alan Moore's latest book (co-authored with his mentor, Steve Moore [no relation], now deceased), *The Moon and Serpent Bumper Book of Magic*. In it the Moores (although it seems to me that Alan was the one who did most of the writing even if it was based on notes and discussions participated in by both of them) lay out a conception of a magical universe of artistry and imagination, a parallel universe to that one which requires us to eat and go to the toilet and, if we are really unlucky, have need to earn money. Moore's idea, laid out in writing in the book, is that there is a parallel imaginal world to the material world, one he calls "Ideaspace" in interviews and "The Immaterialia" in his explicitly magical comic book series, *Promethea*, a story about what is essentially a goddess of imagination who appears whenever someone starts telling a story about her (which brings her into the material world. For reference, Moore regards the material and immaterial worlds as both "real". "Reality" then encompasses these worlds together and is never an expression of materialism. As Moore repeatedly points out, the imagination is beyond the scientific material conception of reality or its physically bounded concepts of existence, of sight and of evidence.). This imaginal world is literally a product of imagination but encompasses language, art and consciousness as well, the combination of all four (which Moore sees as really the same thing anyway) being MAGIC.

Now by “magic” we may have been conditioned to either think of performers who design tricks in order to bamboozle or delight us with their trickery in theatre shows or on TV or more arcane (and often egotistical) figures who draw stone circles on the floor decorated with various sigils and imagine to commune with demons. Such people may read books written in strange languages or say that they have access to hidden (the literal meaning of “occult”) or forbidden knowledge. Moore does not really mean either of these things by “magic” – although he seems to have dabbled in a bit of both. What Moore’s quite comprehensive magical grimoire seems to be about is the power to imagine and devising exercises in which one seeks, deliberately, to expand and encourage the imagination. (When Moore talks about “magic” in the *Bumper Book* I in fact substitute the word “imagination” for it in my own mind. The two seem perfectly interchangeable.)

This is then why the book goes through systems of thought such as the Kabbalah or Tarot (as Alan Moore also does, by storied means, in the book *Promethea*) and suggests various activities one might try (like imagining conversations with “entities”) “on a rainy day”. Moore’s thesis that art, imagination, language and consciousness are really the same thing seems to lead him to the view that what, once, was just “magic”, has become dismembered over time, demystified and, to some extent, defanged, until, today, we have lost access to that magical power which is precisely the social power of art, of imagination, of language, of consciousness. By engaging in conscious story-telling, by imagining on purpose, by encouraging the artistic impulse that results in creation from nothing, Moore sees an avenue, perhaps THE avenue, to reinvigorating, and redirecting, conscious social life, to what amounts to a conjuring. “Become transfixed, become transfigured” says V to his protege, Evey, in *V for Vendetta*. That book was written before Moore’s decision to become a magician. But its a statement Moore the magician would

heartily re-endorse because even the pre-magician Moore of 40 years ago knew that “ideas are bulletproof”.

And this is what Moore’s magical ideas and philosophy are about – the creative expansion of the world of ideas and the imagination, the realisation that you are what you can think and that what you think is what you become. From this magical perspective advertising agencies and politicians of various stripes are all just conjurers trying to imagine various kinds of world and bring them into materiality by their creativity and language and imagination (or lack of it). They seek to create types of consciousness, probably venal, self-serving ones given those examples, but kinds of consciousness nevertheless. Moore, in his books, especially lauds the power of the imagination, of art, of language, to affect our material world and not just the immaterial one. Things like money or human values are explicit fictions which affect how one person interacts with another on a day to day basis. So what we think, and how we imagine the world, not least in terms of its relationships, is vital to the creating of *any* material reality we can experience. The immaterial matters to, and affects, the material. How we imagine changes, and creates, everything in and through its associations in consciousness.

Such a point of view is illuminated (quite appropriately) by the themes encountered in the films of Terry Gilliam, a man known for his eponymously named “Gilliamesque” view of the world. In interviews I have seen him refer to this as a penchant for “magical reality”, a view that life is more than the mundane even if it can always be reduced to the mundane. Early films like *Monty Python and The Holy Grail* or *Jabberwocky* or *Time Bandits* are quite overt combinations of muck and magic and depict times and places more primitive than our own – but they are always spiced up with an idea or two and its not necessarily the adults

who are giving them (i.e. Kevin in *Time Bandits* who reads books and seems the smartest of the lot).

Gilliam's film canon develops to be about ideas and imaginations as either means of survival or things to be wrestled with whether in the fantasies of Sam Lowry in *Brazil*, the outrageous lies of the title character in *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* or the madness of Parry in *The Fisher King* or James Cole in *Twelve Monkeys*. Even the constant stream of drugs in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* gives the fictional Hunter S. Thompson some kind of world to keep on trying to exist in – and no doubt a reality altering one at that. Meanwhile, *The Brothers Grimm* is about two brothers who make up stories (and, in this version, act them out) in order to make a living whilst having to overcome dreams of empire and of a fairytale queen in the story they are set in, *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* is about a travelling theatre show in which members of the public literally enter someone else's imagination (someone, moreover, who used to have a job "telling the story that maintains the universe") in order to fulfil their dreams and *The Zero Theorem* is about a man suffering from his idea that the world is meaningless, an empty void. This, for a time, becomes satiated by sexual desire (its own form of imaginary world) but when that is exposed as a sham he finds himself lost once more. Lastly, *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* is a story about a man who believes he is Don Quixote because he once played him in a film, a film, moreover, in which the making of it changed several lives. Imagination, once more, affects the material world.

Now I missed out *Tideland* in that brief recitation of Terry Gilliam's filmography. That wasn't done on purpose but it was fortunate as it is a particular example of this phenomenon "the imagination as a survival tool" that I am talking about. This film, small in scale and scope, is once more about a child, Jaliza Rose, who has junkies for parents.

The mom dies in dubious circumstances and, to avoid responsibility, the dad takes Jaliza Rose to his mom's old house in the countryside, a place he seemingly hasn't been for years since, when they get there, its abandoned. Jaliza Rose, an only child, keeps herself amused by talking to dolls' heads she sticks on her fingers and Gilliam happily depicts their imaginary (but meaningful) conversations. Well, Jaliza Rose's father then goes and overdoses one day on the heroin he is still taking (with his daughter's help to the scandalisation of some audience members) and she is left to her imaginary friends and the strangely parochial couple of country folk she has met just poking about the place. The entire scene the film creates is one of insularity and an imaginary world where outside rules do not apply. Even the trains that occasionally pass are seen as an imposition on this world as they are from the outside. They are alien and foreign. Inside this world (where people get stuffed and preserved by means of taxidermy and carry on as dead characters) everything has its own ways and its own rules. It is literally an imaginary world where the imagination is how those within it survive.

But it seems to me, reflecting on the films of Gilliam, that this is every world. EVERY world is imaginary and in each one of these worlds the imagination is the tool of survival. This is as true for Sam Lowry with his dreams of what turns out to be Jill Layton in *Brazil* as it is of the Robin Williams played Parry in *The Fisher King*. People in trauma or distress, or living under oppressive ideologies, have need to imagine other existences and other worlds in order to survive the ones they are in. But even having the need to do that suggests that somewhere else down the line a particular vision of life has already been imaginarily impressed upon them necessitating the need to imagine a better alternative. **What creates the world? What we imagine creates the world.** And what we then imagine can, potentially, also recreate it.

So, as in *Parnassus*, it is a matter of “the story that sustains the universe”, the story without which, for any of us, there is nothing. It is the realisation that it is stories, imaginatively created stories in every case, that sustains the universe and, incidentally, our lives, in the first place. It is a matter of the need to keep telling such stories and the necessity to keep having to believe in them even though their substance is simply one of story and imagination. If we should ask if these stories have any other kind of integrity we should probably realise that even the story we see in a film is not necessary in any determinative sense. A film is the illusion of narrative constructed 24 still frames per second at a time. A story is an illusion, an imaginative illusion. Free will and cause and effect or “justice” might be exactly just such stories but that doesn’t stop us believing in them for that is what stories and the imagination are there to do: give us things to believe in. What would you be if you believed in nothing or could imagine no story in which things “made sense” or gave you reason to desire or to live another day?

The title characters in *The Brothers Grimm* are introduced to us as con artists fooling the people of rural Germany into believing that their stories of ghouls and witches are real in order that they may get rich by dealing with the faked supernatural problems. Today tech dudes tell us that “AI” will solve everything for much the same reasons and when the AI concerned isn’t even really AI at all. Both make leaps of imagination in order to suck you into a story of benefit to them. But its not that we then counter this imaginary world with “reality” (as Richard Dawkins might foolishly posit) for, having learned from wisdom of Moore and Gilliam, we know that imagination is no less real (or consequential) than materiality is. What we need to do is imagine a better story, to change consciousness, and have that better story affect the world instead. Here we need some help from Professor Stanley Fish in order to understand why and how that is done.

5. Some Fishy Rhetoric

The issue here is “rhetoric” and, indeed, a rhetoric of rhetoric. Rhetoric has been around for a while and, seemingly ever since it was first imagined, it has been seen, at least by some, as a problem. It pops up now and again as an overt subject of discussion throughout Western history, as Stanley Fish details in his essay succinctly titled “Rhetoric” from his 1989 book *Doing What Comes Naturally*. For example:

“‘There is no need,’ declares Socrates in Plato’s Gorgias, ‘for rhetoric to know the facts at all, for it has hit upon a means of persuasion that enables it to appear in the eyes of the ignorant to know more than those who really know’, and in the Phaedrus the title figure admits that the ‘man who plans to be an orator’ need not ‘learn what is really just and true, but only what seems so to the crowd.’”

So immediately rhetoric is cast as that form of linguistic trickery which knows just enough to be able to manipulate people at large. It is smooth words, that which can convince and lead people wherever it wants to lead them. It is not concerned with reality but with what people can be made to believe or accept. Fish points out that this makes rhetoric epistemologically, morally and socially dubious. In fact, as Fish goes on to set out, “rhetoric” finds itself on the downside of a lot of binary oppositions. These are:

“inner/outer, deep/surface, essential/peripheral, unmediated/mediated, clear/colored, necessary/contingent, straightforward/angled, abiding/fleeting, reason/passion, things/words, realities/illusions, fact/opinion, neutral/partisan. Underlying this list, which is by no means exhaustive, are three basic oppositions: first, between a truth that exists independently of all perspectives and points of view and the many truths that emerge and

seem perspicuous when a particular perspective or point of view has been established and is in force; second, an opposition between true knowledge, which is knowledge as it exists apart from any and all systems of belief, and the knowledge, which because it flows from some or other system of belief, is incomplete and partial (in the sense of biased); and third, an opposition between a self or consciousness that is turned outward in an effort to apprehend and attach itself to truth and true knowledge and a self or consciousness that is turned inward in the direction of its own prejudices, which, far from being transcended, continue to inform its every word and action. Each of these oppositions is attached in turn to an opposition between two kinds of language: on the one hand, language that faithfully reflects or reports on matters of fact uncolored by any personal or partisan agenda or desire; and on the other hand, language that is infected by partisan agendas and desires, and therefore colors and distorts the facts which it purports to reflect. It is use of the second kind of language that makes one a rhetorician, while adherence to the first kind makes one a seeker after truth and an objective observer of the way things are. It is this distinction that, as Thomas Kuhn notes, underwrites the claims of science to be a privileged form of discourse because it has recourse to a 'neutral observation language,' a language uninflected by any mediating presuppositions or preconceptions; and it is the same distinction that informs Aristotle's observation that 'Nobody uses fine language when teaching geometry.' The language of geometry-of formal rules with no substantive content-is contrasted by Aristotle to all those languages that are intended only to 'charm the hearer,' the languages of manipulation, deception, and self-consciously deployed strategy.

It is this understanding of linguistic possibilities and dangers that generates a succession of efforts to construct a language from which all perspectival bias (a redundant phrase) has been eliminated, efforts that have sometimes taken as a model the notations of

mathematics, at other times the operations of logic, and more recently the purely formal calculations of a digital computer."

As we can see here from even this brief analysis, what the enemies of rhetoric want to do is take the very possibility for rhetoric, for what we might otherwise call some version of imagination, out of the realm of linguistic possibility. Such people would, if possible, like to establish an obligatory formal correspondence between linguistic utterance or thought and the reality it applies to. An example of this was the logical positivist Rudolf Carnap. As Fish reports:

"Carnap would admit into the lexicon only words that can be tied firmly to 'protocol' or 'observation' sentences, sentences that satisfy certain truth conditions and are therefore verifiable by reference to the facts of the world. The stipulation of this criterion, Carnap asserts, 'takes away one's freedom to decide what one wishes to mean by [a] word.' The freedom of individual speakers and hearers would be further taken away if the words of a verifiable lexicon were embedded in a grammar that 'corresponded exactly to logical syntax,' for if that were the case 'pseudo-statements could not arise'. That is, no one could be misled either by the words of another or by that part of his consciousness inclined to wander from the path of truth; the tendency of language to perform in excess of its proper duty - to report or reflect matters of fact - would be curbed in advance, and the mind's susceptibility to the power of a language unconstrained by its empirical moorings would be neutralized. In short, the danger posed by rhetoric, both to the field of discourse and the discoursing consciousness, would have been eliminated."

This vision of the world, as Fish notes, is the partisan choice between "the plain unvarnished truth straightforwardly presented" and "language that has transgressed the

limits of representation and substituted its own forms for the forms of reality.” Put in terms more relevant to this chapter, it is talk which represents reality in its essential, unimagined nature as opposed to that which is tarnished by being imagined at all. Reality, so the first kind of people think, is nothing to do with imagination. It just is what it is and it is our moral, social and epistemological duty to represent it properly, as it is, a function this point of view imagines (haha) we can achieve. In a universe conceived of as “an independent reality whose outlines can be perceived by a sufficiently clear-eyed observer who can then represent them in a transparent verbal medium” rhetoric, and so by association imagination, will always be a bad thing.

But this is not the only way to imagine rhetoric, comparing it to a fixed world a transparent verbal or written medium will be able to convey intact and with complete accuracy, and then inevitably finding it wanting. Compare another Greek view of rhetoric upon which Fish reports:

“if the highest truth for any man is what he believes it to be (Theaetetus, 152a), the skill which produces belief and therefore establishes what, in a particular time and particular place, is true, is the skill essential to the building and maintaining of a civilized society. In the absence of a revealed truth, rhetoric is that skill, and in teaching it the sophists were teaching ‘the one thing that mattered, how to take care of one’s own affairs and the business of the state.’ The rhetorician is like a physician; it is his job ‘to diagnose the particular institution and prescribe the best course of action for a man or a state under given conditions’ (see Plato, Theaetetus, 167b-d, Protagoras, 318e-19a); and when Socrates asks Protagoras if he is ‘promising to make men good citizens,’ the reply is firm: ‘That . . . is exactly what I profess to do’ (Protagoras, 319a).”

Rhetoric has now been put in a good light and presented as a civilisationally useful skill. In putting things this way and that, in imagining them one way and another, it becomes a belief-making tool and so a truth-finding tool. It becomes allied to the moral, social and epistemological agenda in which that matters.

But what we have here more generally is two competing stories and, as Fish forwards his own story based on the constructions of Richard Lanham, two imaginings of the human being, "Serious Man" (the re-presenter of reality) and "Rhetorical Man" (the manipulator of reality):

"Serious Man possesses a central self, an irreducible identity. These selves combine into a single, homogeneously real society which constitutes a referent reality for the men living in it. This referent society is in turn contained in a physical nature itself referential, standing 'out there' independent of man. Man has invented language to communicate with his fellow man. He communicates facts and concepts about both nature and society. He can also communicate a third category of response, emotions. When he is communicating facts or concepts, success is measured by something we call clarity. When he is communicating feelings, success is measured by something we call sincerity, faithfulness to the self who is doing the feeling...

[Rhetorical Man] is an actor; his reality public, dramatic. His sense of identity depends on the reassurance of daily histrionic re-enactment. He is thus centered in time and concrete local event. The lowest common denominator of his life is a social situation. . . . He assumes a natural agility in changing orientations. . . . From birth, almost, he has dwelt not in a single value-structure but in several. He is thus committed to no single construction of the world; much rather, to prevailing in the game at hand He accepts the present paradigm

and explores its resources. Rhetorical man is trained not to discover reality but to manipulate it. Reality is what is accepted as reality, what is useful."

We can point up these pencil sketches by noting what is at stake here. (The short answer is: the way you imagine the world is at stake. But how important, or essential, that is to anything is, to say the least, a moot point.) So Fish adds (in a paragraph in which "Serious Man" has now become "the philosopher":

"In the philosopher's vision of the world rhetoric (and representation in general) is merely the (disposable) form by which a prior and substantial content is conveyed; but in the world of homo rhetoricus rhetoric is both form and content, the manner of presentation and what is presented; the 'improvising power of the rhetor' is at once all-creating and the guarantee of the impermanence of its creations: to make a thing beautiful or unbeautiful, just or unjust, good or bad is both a human power and a sign of the insubstantiality of these attributes."

So the (serious) realist and the (rhetorical) rhetor are not living in the same world or imagining the same things. The serious realist, in fact, imagines not to imagine at all. Fish remarks:

"And so it has gone; the history of Western thought could be written as the history of this quarrel. And, indeed, such histories have been written and with predictably different emphases. In one version, written many times, the mists of religion, magic, and verbal incantation (all equivalently suspect forms of fantasy) are dispelled by the Enlightenment rediscovery of reason and science; enthusiasm and metaphor alike are curbed by the refinement of method, and the effects of difference (point of view) are bracketed and held

in check by a procedural rigor. In another version (told by a line stretching from Vico to Foucault) a carnivalesque world of exuberance and possibility is drastically impoverished by the ascendancy of a soulless reason, a brutally narrow perspective that claims to be objective and proceeds in a repressive manner to enforce its claim. It is not my intention here to endorse either history or to offer a third or to argue as some have for a nonhistory of discontinuous episteme innocent of either a progressive or lapsarian curve; rather, I only wish to point out that the debate continues to this very day and that its terms are exactly those one finds in the dialogues of Plato and the orations of the sophists."

Often, of course, the terms of such debate might not necessarily matter. One does not need to epistemologically or morally site every item in every conversation one has or point one makes. Topics and subjects of discussion are not all equally threatened by rhetorical flourishes or imaginal schemes. But some, such as "science" (or, as some thought in a previous section, "history"), are. (Alan Moore would have those apparently hard, reality-representing things "science" and "medicine" (as well as "history" for this is writing) as a part of what he imagines magic to be but that only tells us that, in this section of my chapter, he has come down on the side of rhetoric and imagination.) So Fish gives us his quick summary of the impact of Thomas Kuhn's 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* on this debate:

"The name that everyone always refers to (in praise or blame) is Thomas Kuhn. His The Structure of Scientific Revolutions is arguably the most frequently cited work in the humanities and social sciences in the past twenty-five years [i.e. the mid-Sixties to the late Eighties], and it is rhetorical through and through. Kuhn begins by rehearsing and challenging the orthodox model of scientific inquiry in which independent facts are first collected by objective methods and then build up into a picture of nature, a picture that he

himself either confirms or rejects in the context of controlled experiments. In this model, science is a cumulative process' (p. 3) in which each new discovery adds 'one more item to the population of the scientist's world' (p. 7). The shape of that world - of the scientist's professional activities - is determined by the shapes (of fact and structure) already existing in the larger world of nature, shapes that constrain and guide the scientist's work.

Kuhn challenges this story by introducing the notion of a paradigm, a set of tacit assumptions and beliefs within which research goes on, assumptions which rather than deriving from the observation of facts are determinative of the facts that could possibly be observed. It follows, then, that when observations made within different paradigms conflict, there is no principled (i.e., non-rhetorical) way to adjudicate the dispute. One cannot put the competing accounts to the test of fact, because the specification of fact is precisely what is at issue between them; a fact cited by one party would be seen as a mistake by the other. What this means is that science does not proceed by offering its descriptions to the independent judgment of nature; rather, it proceeds when the proponents of one paradigm are able to present their case in a way that the adherents of other paradigms find compelling. In short, the 'motor' by which science moves is not verification or falsification, but persuasion. Indeed, says Kuhn, in the end the force of scientific argument 'is only that of persuasion' (p. 94). In the case of disagreement, 'each party must try, by persuasion, to convert the other' (p. 198), and when one party succeeds there is no higher court to which the outcome might be referred: 'there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community' (p. 94). 'What better criterion,' asks Kuhn, 'could there be?' (p. 170).

The answer given by those who were horrified by Kuhn's rhetoricization of scientific procedure was predictable: a better criterion would be one that was not captive to a

particular paradigm but provided a neutral space in which competing paradigms could be disinterestedly assessed. By denying such a criterion, Kuhn leaves us in a world of epistemological and moral anarchy."

Kuhn made the world, and, shock horror, the world, of all things, of science, relative to imaginary schemes. Nothing was representing "how the world was" for all was becoming conformed to how the world was imagined to be, an imaginary scheme always waiting to be replaced by a new one that was bound to come along, sooner or later, and do a better job of being the most convincing, and so most useful, imaginary scheme. Why were they imaginary schemes? Because you cannot give any such schemes the imagined credibility of hard-nosed "reality" if they are simply the current best way to think of things that we can currently imagine. And what would be this "best way"? It would be the way which best aligns with our purposes and the uses for which we want to put that which we denominate "knowledge" or "justified belief". The human being, so many would suggest, is ultimately a very pragmatic animal. It needs to have things to rely on, things that seem to it to work and have the desired effects with some measure of predictability or consistency. A world that works is the kind of world that a human being needs to have, the kind of environment it can prosper in. So it is this kind of world that the human being looks for. And finds.

But where does that leave rhetoric and its concomitant, imagination? It leaves them playing a role within such an appreciation of day to day human existence. It leaves "reality", in the constructions of Serious Man, prey to them entirely. It ushers in the era of Rhetorical Man. Here again we can note what Fish himself describes as "Nietzsche's account of truth and reality as rhetorical" (which, in other terms, means "imaginary" – but in such a way as it is not there at all useless as a consequence. Quite the opposite, in fact).

We can note, as Fish reports, that: “deconstructive or post-structuralist thought is supremely rhetorical: it systematically asserts and demonstrates the mediated, constructed, partial, socially-constituted nature of all realities, whether they be phenomenal, linguistic, or psychological.” We can note that “Theories... are themselves rhetorics whose usefulness is a function of contingent circumstances”, these “contingent circumstances” being themselves imagined and rhetorically postulated. FOR REALITY CANNOT, AND SO DOES NOT, SPEAK FOR ITSELF. If you want to know what reality is, you have to imagine it – and even when you imagine that what you are really doing is representing it as it really is using a neutral language which neither colours nor distorts what has been imagined to be represented in any way. (This isn’t happening, by the by, except in the imagination, because language, in Moore’s terms a synonym for imagination or art or consciousness, is not employed to represent or to correspond but to use and to imagine. Language is imaginative use of reality, an artistic rendering of thought. Reality is the canvas on which it paints and the substance of what it imagines. Such reality is magic, a rhetorical conjuring.

All this is to say, as Fish does in another essay in the same book, this time called “Change”, that, quoting Richard Rorty:

“‘there is no way to think about either the world or our purposes except by using OUR language,’ no way ‘of breaking out of [OUR] language to compare it with something else.’”
(emphasis mine)

Or we could quote Stanley Fish himself on this same point when he argues in his seminal book on Reader Response Theory *Is There a Text in This Class?* that we cannot check our interpretive accounts against the facts of the text because it is only within our accounts –

that is, within an already assumed set of stipulative definitions and evidentiary criteria – (something we imagine) that the text and its facts, or, rather, a text and its facts, emerge and become available for inspection.

All these points of view are, in my terms, making the point that imagination (or language or art or consciousness, or even rhetoric) rules the roost and so is a necessary tool for engaging, and making use of, reality. When this imagination is put in debating terms or presented polemically it is renamed “rhetoric”. Put in the terms of Alan Moore’s magical vision of things, this imagination and rhetoric is a matter of the “conjuring” that magic might be said to be interested in working by means of language or art or consciousness (or, indeed, imagining). A rhetoric which then asserts that reality *is* a matter of “conjuring” is then not very far away. And why should it be when, in the same essay, “Change”, Fish imagines the human network of beliefs as “nested” and beliefs themselves as entities which exist in a context of being able to modify, alter and change each other, consequent on how they fit together, or can be configured and reconfigured, in the imagined “nest”? This is Fish’s way of talking about the fact that what we imagine (singularly or collectively) can be reimagined. Imagination is not forced to be static and is, in fact, at its best and working properly precisely when it isn’t. So:

“beliefs are not all held at the same level or operative at the same time. Beliefs, if I may use a metaphor, are nested, and on occasion they may affect and even alter one another and so alter the entire system or network they comprise. Even though the mind is informed by assumptions that limit what it can even notice, among those is the assumption that one’s assumptions are subject to challenge and possible revision under certain circumstances and according to certain procedures when they are set in motion by certain persons. What this means is that the mind is not a static structure, but an assemblage of related beliefs any

one of which can exert pressure on any other in a motion that can lead to a self-transformation... rather than being an object of which one might ask, 'how does it change,' the mind (and, by extension, the community) is an engine of change, an ongoing project whose operations are at once constrained and the means by which those same constraints can be altered."

Such thinking challenges the notion, once again, of the Serious Man that reality, a hard, fixed, material thing, is a measure and that it is by literally measuring up to it, in and with our thinking, that we get it either right or wrong (and so progress or don't). The problem here, as Fish comments upon in "Change", is that there can be no such entities as an empirical "inside" and "outside" of us but only interpreted (i.e. imagined, conjured) versions of the same. (In truth anything we can think of linguistically can only be this – as extrapolating this point for yourself should make plain.) So:

"it is [misleading] to think of change as the process by which something from the outside penetrates and alters the inside of a community or of a consciousness informed by community assumptions. It is misleading because it assumes that the distinction between outside and inside is empirical and absolute, whereas in fact it is an interpretive distinction between realms that are interdependent rather than discrete."

Fish counters, then, that there can only be "an interpreted outside" and that means an imagined outside, a conjured outside, a rhetorical outside. It is not just what's in the mind that is prey to imagination and subject to rhetoric in its description, but what is (imagined) outside as well. Thus, we can say that minds, and by extension communities, are "always engaged in doing work, the work of transforming the landscape into material for [their] own project." This work, Fish goes on to say, "is then itself transformed by the very work it

does,” a constant process of re-imagination and a constant rhetoric of description and redescription as the conjuring can never cease.

Imagination, and its public dispersal as rhetoric, would then seem to become inevitable and, indeed, the engine of our lives if we are imagined as intellectually enabled people. In “Change” Fish adapts these insights to his theory of interpretive communities and essentially concludes that we are sets of constantly updating community practices which are imaginings that comprise both the content and the form of our minds and constitute our ability to exist in an environment. Put in a further way, as Fish does in yet another essay in *Doing What Comes Naturally* titled “Consequences”, this is to say that “there is no way of testing our beliefs against something whose source is not also a belief.” Belief in this formulation is just another word for “imagination” or “rhetoric”. It is in this sense that we can take on board Fish’s assertion, in the very same essay, that “Beliefs are not what you think *about* but what you think *with*.” By this I understand Fish to be saying that we imagine the world, and indeed the universe, we live in and that we use that imagination, publicly presented as rhetoric, *habitually* to navigate ourselves through the existential consequences and experiences of our lives.

6. Myths, Fiction and “Philosophy as Poetry”: A Miniature Case for the Priority of Imagination

I could go on pulling out and exemplifying the similar ideas of all kinds of thinkers for a very long time but the fact is this book is not simply about this subject and I must have some intention of providing a fairly coherent and concise account of what I want to say. But before I draw this particular chapter to a close in an interaction with nothing there are the

thoughts of three further thinkers I want to consider. These are the philosophers Mary Midgley, Paul Ricoeur and Richard Rorty.

I start with Midgley who, in her book *The Myths We Live By*, begins in the following way:

"We are accustomed to think of myths as the opposite of science. But in fact they are a central part of it: the part that decides its significance in our lives. So we very much need to understand them.

Myths are not lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning. For instance, machine imagery, which began to pervade our thought in the seventeenth century, is still potent today. We still often tend to see ourselves, and the living things around us, as pieces of clockwork: items of a kind that we ourselves could make, and might decide to remake if it suits us better. Hence the confident language of 'genetic engineering' and 'the building-blocks of life'.

Again, the reductive, atomistic picture of explanation, which suggests that the right way to understand complex wholes is always to break them down into their smallest parts, leads us to think that truth is always revealed at the end of that other seventeenth-century invention, the microscope. Where microscopes dominate our imagination, we feel that the large wholes we deal with in everyday experience are mere appearances. Only the particles revealed at the bottom of the microscope are real. Thus, to an extent unknown in earlier times, our dominant technology shapes our symbolism and thereby our metaphysics, our view about what is real. The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone – steel

and glass, plastic and rubber and silicon – of his own devising and sees them as the final truth.

Of course this mechanistic imagery does not rule alone. Older myths survive and are still potent, but they are often given a reductive and technological form. Thus, for instance, we are still using the familiar social-contract image of citizens as essentially separate and autonomous individuals. But we are less likely now to defend it on humanistic or religious grounds than by appealing to a neo-Darwinist vision of universal competition between separate entities in an atomised world, which are easily seen as machinery – distinct cogs or bytes put together within a larger mechanism. Social atomism strikes us as scientific.

This same reductive and atomistic picture now leads many enquirers to propose biochemical solutions to today's social and psychological problems, offering each citizen more and better Prozac rather than asking what made them unhappy in the first place. Society appears as split into organisms and organisms into their constituent cogs. The only wider context easily seen as containing all these parts is evolution, understood (in a way that would have surprised Darwin) as a cosmic projection of nineteenth-century economics, a competitive arena pervading the development, not just of life but of our thought and of the whole physical universe.

At present, when people become aware of this imagery, they tend to think of it as merely a surface dressing of isolated metaphors – as a kind of optional decorative paint that is sometimes added to ideas after they are formed, so as to make them clear to outsiders. But really such symbolism is an integral part of our thought-structure. It does crucial work on all topics, not just in a few supposedly marginal areas such as religion and emotion, where symbols are known to be at home, but throughout our thinking. The way in which we

imagine the world determines what we think important in it, what we select for our attention among the welter of facts that constantly flood in upon us. Only after we have made that selection can we start to form our official, literal, thoughts and descriptions. That is why we need to become aware of these symbols."

We can see from the very first sentence here that Midgley has an obsession with "science" that I don't share. She, in my view, imagines science as some kind of controlling or master narrative, something everything else has to come under the auspices of in order to be made appropriately rational. I think that science is just a way of seeing the world, a method or set of problems and practices that's good for some things but not others, a kind of talk. What I don't think science is is a master narrative or the singularly appropriate way to understand "reality", it being imagined reality's own way of doing so. So it seems to me that, in reading Midgley's first paragraph, she more properly has things backwards: its not that "myths are a part of science" (although I agree with her they are) but that "science is a part of myths".

Midgley continues that myths *"are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning."* But if something is a "pattern" or a "network" isn't that describing structure and/or relationship? I think it is and so equating this with "shaping its meaning" seems a rather timid way to put it. I agree, of course, that the meaning is definitely shaped. But I think the structure is also shaped. I think that, with myth (which is simply a Greek word for "story"), what we are envisioning is imagined whole and entire. You tell stories to understand, shape and structure everything, not a bit of the thing. Stories contextualise wholes. It is not just a matter of the meaning part for you cannot separate meaning from structure or relationship. The clockwork imagery Midgley herself uses here is a most apposite example

(one also used by Alan Moore in his characterisation of Doctor Manhattan in the book *Watchmen*) but its not just about meaning. The myth imposes a structure upon reality and the relationships of its components (it being imagined to even have components in need of relating). Its all or nothing. Doctor Manhattan in *Watchmen* as written by Moore is a perfect example of this in that we see in that fiction how it completely affects his view of existence and reality itself. It is not just about meaning but is also an inseparable aspect of the matter. Reality, an imaginary human word and concept, isn't just bits of material stuff to which we attach meanings. Rather, nothing escapes the organising gaze of our imagination. Everything is perceived "as imagined", as made myth of. Everything is part of a story which sites and constitutes it. How we imagine creates the world – in terms of meaning, structure and relationship – and without this imagining (here thought of as myth) there is nothing to say. When Midgley says that "*symbolism is an integral part of our thought-structure*" I think she is making the crucial point. I read her as saying that without imagination there is no thinking – and that thinking is imagination through and through.

My next subject of discussion is then Paul Ricoeur's lecture and essay "The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality" where he would seemingly agree with my recent assertion since he begins by saying that "symbolic systems 'make' and 'remake' the world and... our aesthetical grasping of the world is a militant understanding that 'reorganizes the world in terms of works and works in terms of world'". (He is here agreeing with one Nelson Goodman and the first chapter of his book *Languages of Art*.) Ricoeur can also imagine that "fictions... 'remake' human action or praxis as the practical fictions which are called ideologies and utopias." He sees "fictions" as matters of "a general theory of imagination" (do you have one of those? This chapter is probably suggesting you should have) and of "productive reference", something he thinks "equivalent to reality shaping".

Here we come upon things discussed before:

"In the case of fiction... there is no given model, in the sense of an original already there, to which it could be referred... It's [a] new combination which has no reference in a previous original to which the image would be the copy. And this defines the status of unreality."

When you fictionalise something you are making new (from nothing?) rather than reproducing or re-presenting something. Fiction's starting point (in the imagination), thinks Ricoeur, is found in the difference and lack of symmetry between an absence which produces total lack, literal nothingness, and that nothingness which is the basis of fiction just described, an "unreality". In fiction it is the lack of referent for the fiction which, for him, is the pertinent issue. This lack, this "nothingness", is what, for Ricoeur, opens a way to seeing fiction as "productive" in terms of reality. Thus Ricoeur's assertions in this essay that "fiction changes reality, in the sense that it both 'invents' and 'discovers' it" and "Imagination at work – in a work – produces itself as a world." So:

"Writing a poem, telling a story, construing an hypothesis, a plan, or a strategy: these are the kinds of contexts of work which provide a perspective to imagination and allow it to be 'productive.'"

It seems important to add here Ricoeur's later assertion that:

"The seeing created by language is... not a seeing of this or that; it is a 'seeing-as.' This 'seeing-as' has little to do with the Humean image, image as a simple residue of an impression [i.e. as imagined in the philosophy of David Hume]. To see-as is to apprehend the meaning alluded to in a display of regulated images."

Ricoeur goes on to describe this as “images engendered by poetic diction itself” and (he imagines with Jean-Paul Sartre) as “the self-deceptive attempt to possess magically the object of desire” (also compare Alan Moore here who thinks language IS magic and pretty much co-extensive with imagination). In a context of imagination, Ricoeur thinks the use of fiction is something like the creation of a “neutralised atmosphere” where reality can be simulated (“epoche of the real”) and “in this state of non-engagement we try new ideas, new values, new ways of being-in-the-world.” Fiction for Ricoeur is a “redescription of reality” within an imagination which is the “free play of possibilities”. Ironically, it is because, as Ricoeur asserts, fiction has no referent in reality that it is “able to display a world” and become “an attempt to capture the universe in a web of abridged signs”. But, in our modern context, as Midgley also evidenced, there is an issue with our imagining and world creating. That issue is our hierarchicalising of art and science. Put in the context of imagination, Ricoeur puts it like this:

“The more imagination deviates from that which is called reality in ordinary language and vision, the more it approaches the heart of the reality which is no longer the world of manipulable objects, but the world into which we have been thrown by birth and within which we try to orient ourselves by projecting our innermost possibilities upon it, in order that we dwell there, in the strongest sense of that word. But this paradox is only sustainable if we happen to concede that we have not only to amend our ideas as to what an image is, but also our prejudices as to what reality is. Under the shock of fiction, reality becomes problematic. We attempt to elude this painful situation by putting beyond criticism a concept of reality according to which the ‘real’ is what our everyday interests project upon the horizon of the world. This prejudice is not displaced but reinforced by our scientific culture, in that for science reality is what science declares it to be; only scientific discourse denotes reality. Consequently, poetry and painting do not denote, but are content

to display some subjective connotations totally lacking in truth-claims... Nothing is more harmful for a sound recognition of the productive reference of the imagination than this dichotomy between the sciences and the arts."

Ricoeur's point here appears to be that regular scientific discourse, philosophy that valorises science most highly and, indeed, makes it a master discourse, cannot allow what is productive to be the matter of "imagination" (which seems to come from nowhere) nor to be fiction's production of "unreality". Science, a "realist" discipline in philosophical terms, imagines itself as ideally re-presenting what's there in words. Its self-image (in many cases) is then a matter not of imagination but of recognition labelled "knowledge". "Imagination" and "fiction" can then only be imagined bad words for such a discourse.

This is immediately confirmed when reading Richard Rorty's excellent three lecture series *Philosophy as Poetry*, a series about why we need to forget "Platonism", and its various contingent updates ever since (which exist today as various hard and soft realisms in which "science talk" is their privileged language), and replace it with "narrative philosophy", something Rorty imagines himself a proponent of and this lecture series to be an example of. Here, a few twists and turns aside, "the only hope for the future lies in the human imagination" and the enemy is non-human authorities ("reality" is a good one) before which we are meant to bow down and genuflect. The contrast here then is between something we are expected to acknowledge and revere, "Reality with a capital R", and imagining (and it is "imagining") better futures.

Let's take a tour through *Philosophy as Poetry*, both to see what Rorty says (his argument will be well known to those familiar with him) and also to see what it triggers. Both should be useful. As ever, Rorty begins with the problematic:

"COMMON SENSE DISTINGUISHES BETWEEN THE APPARENT color of a thing and its real color, between the apparent motions of heavenly bodies and their real motions, between nondairy creamer and real cream, and between imitation Rolexes and real ones. But only those with a taste for philosophy ask whether real Rolexes are really real. Only philosophers take seriously Plato's distinction between Reality with a capital R and Appearance with a capital A. That distinction has outlived whatever usefulness it may have had. We should do our best to get rid of it.

If we did so, we should no longer wonder whether the human mind, or human language, is capable of representing reality accurately. We would stop thinking that some parts of our culture are more in touch with reality than other parts. We would express our sense of finitude not by comparing our humanity with something nonhuman but by comparing our way of being human with other, better, ways that may someday be adopted by our descendants. When we condescended to our ancestors, we would not say that they were less in touch with reality than we are, but that their imaginations were more limited than ours. We would boast of being able to talk about more things than they could."

Here Rorty has basically decanted his entire series of three lectures into two paragraphs, delimiting both the problem (here reduced to the reality-appearance distinction – is something “real” or does it only seem to be? Does our mind and language represent reality accurately?) and the solution (get rid of this distinction and do something more productive with the human mind and language like being more imaginative with them). I think that Rorty stumbles into a key way to describe what is going on here though when he describes Plato, shortly after these two paragraphs, as having become “enchanted” by the idea that there could be something (capitalised reality) “even more august and unapproachable than Zeus”. As Rorty (the great narrativiser of the Western Philosophical

Tradition) has it, it was Parmenides and then Plato who set us down the path of fixating about how accurately our minds and language traced reality and made this a goal. Rorty thinks it a huge error and misstep, one that has deceived us ever since. But this is not because it is either right or wrong but because it is a waste of time and unnecessary. It gets us nowhere good.

But here is my point: Rorty describes Plato as having become enchanted by the idea of Reality – and I think “enchanted” is exactly an appropriate word, one that accords with the magical thinking of Alan Moore that I briefly introduced earlier. This is because, in my appreciation of things, language, mind and imagination are exactly enchanting and conjuring faculties and magical language is the best way to describe what is going on. Plato, after Parmenides, conjured Reality with a capital R into existence and they attempted (not altogether unsuccessfully) to enchant their cultures and societies with and by it. Rorty doesn’t put it like this (except for saying that Plato was enchanted by Reality) and even Alan and Steve Moore in their *Moon and Serpent Bumper Book of Magic* don’t put it like this but this is how I would put what both are saying. We may imagine that what Parmenides and Plato did in the rhetoric of Rorty was a conjuring and an enchantment because they imagined something called Reality, said it was real, deployed rhetorical skill in support of it and regarded it as that which was over and above us, that which we had no choice but to accept the authority of. This conjured our duty to reflect and represent it, activity which further solidified it in the human imagination.

Once that was done it was hard, but not impossible, to imagine our way around the subsequent enchantment. Many, not least in the West, still have not. They remain enchanted by what once was conjured. I see “enchantment” and “conjuring” as key functions of things Alan Moore would refer to as magic, things like consciousness, mind,

language, art and imagination. Writing is spells and rhetoric is casting them. (So, yes, I am doing this now in my own mind in and with this book.) Again, Rorty certainly doesn't put it like this but, combining the interests of Alan Moore and Richard Rorty together, and finding my own way to describe it, I do.

But how does Richard Rorty put it? How does he explain the attachment to Reality, the metaphysics and ontology which is imagined to be significant and consequent talk about it, and the epistemology it is then imagined both to create and require? Here now regarding the Platonic position as a modern, "analytic" philosophy which thinks philosophy should be a science because science respects Reality and the imaginative position as a matter of "poetry", Rorty writes:

*"My hypothesis about why ontology remains so popular is that we are still reluctant to admit that **the poetic imagination sets the bounds for human thought**. At the heart of philosophy's quarrel with poetry is the fear that the imagination goes all the way down—that there is nothing we talk about that we might not have talked of differently. This fear causes philosophers to become obsessed by the need to achieve direct access to reality. Direct, in this sense, means 'unmediated by language'—for our language, we are uneasily aware, might well have been different. Before we can rid ourselves of ontology we are going to have to get rid of the idea of nonlinguistic access. This will entail getting rid of faculty psychology. We shall have to give up the picture of the human mind as divided into a good part that puts us in touch with the really real and a bad part that engages in self-stimulation and autosuggestion.*

To get rid of this cluster of bad ideas we need to think of reason not as a truth-tracking faculty but as a social practice—the practice of enforcing social norms on the use of marks

and noises, thereby making it possible to use words rather than blows as a way of getting things done...

On the account of human abilities I am suggesting, the use of persuasion rather than force is an innovation comparable to the beaver's dam. Like the beavers' collaboration in getting the dam built, it is a social practice. It was initiated by the novel suggestion that we might use noises rather than physical compulsion to get other humans to cooperate with us. That suggestion gave rise to language. Rationality, thought, and cognition all began when language did. Language gets off the ground not by people giving names to things they were already thinking about but by proto-humans using noises in innovative ways, just as the proto-beavers got the practice of building dams off the ground by using sticks and mud in innovative ways. Language was, over the millennia, enlarged and rendered more flexible not by adding the names of abstract objects to those of concrete objects but by using marks and noises in ways unconnected with environmental exigencies. The distinction between the concrete and the abstract can be replaced with that between words used in making perceptual reports and those unsuitable for such use.

On the view I am sketching, expressions like 'gravity' and 'inalienable human rights' should not be thought of as names of entities whose nature remains mysterious but as noises and marks, the use of which by various geniuses gave rise to bigger and better social practices. Intellectual and moral progress is not a matter of getting closer to an antecedent goal but of surpassing the past. Beaver dams improved over the millennia as gifted beavers did novel things with sticks and mud, things that were then incorporated into standard dam-building practice. The arts and the sciences improved over the millennia because our more ingenious ancestors did novel things not only with seeds, clay, and metallic ores but also with noises and marks. What we call 'increased knowledge' should not be thought of as increased

access to the Real but as increased ability to do things—to take part in social practices that make possible richer and fuller human lives. This increased richness is not the effect of a magnetic attraction exerted on the human mind by the really real, nor by that mind's innate ability to penetrate the veil of appearance. It is a relation between the human present and the human past, not a relation between the human and the nonhuman." (emphasis mine)

As you will know if you have read Rorty before, this is typical Rortian rhetoric and technique, the redescription of something you thought you were doing (likely because you had been taught that way) as something you might imagine you are doing instead. This is conjuring or casting a spell (with words), one, in this case, deployed to attempt to offset and disrupt a prior enchantment with Reality by conjuring another one based on the use of imagination and about progress. This is an enchantment about times and places and hopes and desires rather than one which sees a duty to conform to some wholly imagined Reality as set in stone in all times and places. The key question of this enchantment is "Where do you want to go?" rather than "Have we got Reality right?"

As Rorty develops his point a key image he uses to do so throughout the rest of his lecture series is one he takes from Ralph Waldo Emerson in what is a historically romantic view of the nature of progress. (Rorty's thesis is to result in the recommendation of Romanticism + Pragmatism but I shall address this later.) Here Emerson writes of "the life of man" in his essay "Circles" as:

"a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end. The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel, will go, depends on the force or truth of the individual soul. . . . Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series. . . . There is no outside, no

inclosing wall, no circumference to us. The man finishes his story—how good! how final! how it puts a new face on all things! He fills the sky. Lo! on the other side rises also a man, and draws a circle around the circle we had just pronounced the outline of the sphere. Then already is our first speaker not man, but only a first speaker. His only redress is forthwith to draw a circle outside of his antagonist. . . . In the thought of tomorrow there is a power to upheave all thy creed, all the creeds, all the literatures of the nations. . . . Men walk as prophecies of the next age.”

What Emerson imagines, of course, is a never-ending conversation, an out-imagining of each other that takes place perpetually in each time and place. Rorty reads it as saying that there is no Real which would stop either this conversation or the imagination that powered it. “There is nothing outside language to which language attempts to become adequate” (if you recall, Fish said the same thing about “beliefs”) and “We shall never find descriptions so perfect that imaginative redescription will become pointless. There is no destined terminus to inquiry. There are only larger human lives to be lived.”

Perhaps “larger” is here an evaluative mistake but the point stands that we cannot use language in such a way that we will never not find another way to use it which comes to seem to some, and perhaps almost all, as better in a given set of circumstances. There can then be no conjuring and no enchantment which we cannot – by use of imagination or language, its the same thing – get ourselves out of or beyond. We can always, in any situation, imagine another way to go or another goal to have. We can always conjure a new vision and engage in yet another enchantment. Rorty, giving reference to what he calls Nietzsche’s “romantic anti-Platonism” which asks us to become “the poets of our own lives”, here talks about “strong poets” but it seems to me we can talk about magicians and magic just as profitably (as Alan Moore himself does of writers and artists

and scientists, for example). In either case, we find ourselves living lives, and in worlds, which are “a creation of the human imagination”.

To do this, however, requires a bit of rewiring how we think about ourselves (given that the dominant view has been the post-Platonic realist view that modern “analytic” realist philosophers see themselves defending. This is the view Rorty is eager to banish with his rhetorical spells). This requires putting the emphasis on a skill – language use, imagination – rather than a relationship – our connection, or not, to the really real. Explaining his view of this skill, Rorty writes:

“Before there were conversational exchanges, on this view, there were neither concepts nor beliefs nor knowledge. For to say that a dog knows its master, or a baby its mother, is like saying that a lock knows when the right key has been inserted, or that a computer knows when it has been given the right password. To say that the frog’s eye tells something to the frog’s brain is like saying that the screwdriver tells something to the screw. The line between mechanism and something categorically distinct from mechanism comes when organisms develop social practices—uses of words—that permit those organisms to consider the relative advantages and disadvantages of alternative descriptions of things. Mechanism stops, and freedom begins, at the point at which we can discuss which words best describe a given situation. Knowledge and freedom are coequal.

*On the romantic view I am commending, the imagination is the source of freedom because it is the source of language... It is not that we first spoke a language that simply reported what was going on around us and later enlarged this language by imaginative redescription. Rather, **imaginativeness goes all the way down.**”* (emphasis mine)

This, for my argument as for Rorty's, is a key insight – and this is why I have highlighted it. It is saying that once you have developed the skill of imaginative because linguistic discrimination lots of other things (like freedom and knowledge) become possible. BUT IT IS ALSO SAYING THAT ALL YOU NEED IS THIS SKILL. In the beginning was the imagination, etc., etc. It is the ability to imagine, and in our case to articulate this with words, a closely allied if not coterminous ability, that makes the difference here and not setting ourselves into a certain relation with some non-human authority we have imagined with it. Indeed, Rorty does not even think that imagination, as he uses it in his argument, is a uniquely human faculty. Glossing it as “the ability to come up with socially useful novelties”, he imagines it equally applicable to ingenious beavers in need of new dam-building ideas as to ingenious humans. But it is being so ingenious that counts, the skill and ability itself. Were I being mischievous for anarchist purposes I might imagine this had something to do with the “self-organisation” I have previously imagined a necessary component of all life, that ability, necessarily ubiquitous in life, to maintain the life one has. It certainly seems advantageous to any form of life to be able to reconfigure its situation in new and different ways, to “roll with the punches” as is said. It will give it all the more flexibility in regard to the challenges of life that such life can face and more ability to face them successfully.

For humans, this is a linguistic matter according to the enchantment Rorty would like to conjure here, a matter of our ability to use “persuasion” to get agreement on collective courses of action. He writes:

“you cannot use persuasion if you cannot talk. No imagination, no language. No linguistic change, no moral or intellectual progress. Rationality is a matter of making allowed moves within language games. Imagination creates the games that reason proceeds to play. Then,

exemplified by people such as Plato and Newton, it keeps modifying those games so that playing them is more interesting and profitable. Reason cannot get outside the latest circle that imagination has drawn. It is in this sense, and only in this sense, that imagination holds the primacy."

This is to say that you can only operate in a space, material or immaterial, that you can imagine – and must have first imagined. Reason works only with what it recognises and for that it must have first been dreamt up. Rorty, a philosopher of "the linguistic turn", equates this with language use – and most of the substance of his philosophy is really an argument for how we are doing things with words and why we should see them as doing some things and not others. He thinks our linguistic skill, that which makes all the difference to us as the creatures we are, a matter of "the priority of the imagination", in the way just described in his quote, as a consequence and he imagines our dilemma as "whether Nietzsche was right to think of the world as our poem rather than as something that somehow communicates information about itself to us." I am something of a convinced Nietzschean so you will be able to imagine which side I come down on here – the side of the poets. But a poem is little other than a conjuring and a conjuring, if effective, can become an enchantment. So, for example:

"Nietzsche thought that Plato's success in putting the term 'really real' into circulation was a great imaginative achievement. But the answer to a great poem is a still better poem, and that is what Nietzsche thought of himself as writing. He asked us to see, as he put it in The Twilight of the Idols, that 'the true world' is a fable, a myth concocted by Parmenides and Plato. The problem, he said, is not that it is a fable, but that it is a fable that has by now exhausted its utility. We should not say that the hope of knowing the intrinsic nature of Reality was an illusion, because, as Nietzsche rightly says, when we give up the notion of a

true world, we give up that of an illusory world as well. The difference between a good old poem and new better poem is not the difference between a bad representation of Reality and a better one."

This appears to leave us very much relying on that skill called, variously, "imagination" or "language use" and it is to contradict the conclusions and directions of travel of those in the European and American educated classes over the last several hundred years who forwarded the primacy of materialism and imagined that everything could be explained and understood once one knew what the smallest particles we could locate were doing and put Reality back together again from there. Indeed, put in one impish way, we might say that this latter way concerns itself exclusively with stuff but that the former way seems to come out of nothing (as I read some historical Romanticists thought too). Indeed, if one is relying on imaginative genius for one's progress then one seems to encourage the idea that geniuses are those with such a finely honed skill of imagination (which is to say that they have such a way with words) that they can indeed "pull things out of thin air". That things come out of thin air would be a notion anathema to the confirmed materialist. This, indeed, is why Rorty's notion of imagination going all the way down and Alan Moore's idea of a parallel Ideospace, which is equally if differently real, to our material world both seem in bad taste to those who think of themselves as good, honest realists. To such a realist, Reality is a materialist matter and imagination, if it is important at all, is only ever so in relation to said materialist Reality. Because, to a materialist, ANYTHING is only important in relation to a purely materialist Reality. Rorty, however, reminds us of "the Nietzschean idea that reason works only within the limits that imagination has set—that rationality is simply a matter of making acceptable moves within a set of social practices" and so reminds us that doing anything at all begins with an ability and not a product of said ability.

What is being emphasised here is that imagination (or language use if you prefer – but it makes no difference) is a TRANSFORMATIVE skill. If we were wandering through the vocabulary of Alan Moore (which I partly am) we might describe it magically as an alchemical skill, a skill which turns one thing into another thing, a thing it seemingly, prior to enchantment and to the working of imaginative and linguistic magic, it would seem impossible for it to become. (An example here is Evey's transformation in the middle section of Moore's *V for Vendetta* in which, at the point of her transformation, the protagonist urges her to "Become transfixed, become transfigured".) But the point of Rorty's "narrative philosophy" here (or, at least, one of its points) is to say that, if you tell the right story in the right way (or, which is the same thing, if you can conjure up the appropriately convincing vision or imagine the appropriately dynamic idea), you can indeed achieve such an apparently alchemical transformation. In the story Rorty is telling, in fact, that human beings are the imaginative, language-using animal that can, using such tools, transform both themselves and their world, this IS THE POINT OF THE STORY, the enchantment to be worked. This is "what makes humans special", their defining characteristic. He links this back up with Emerson's talk of "circles" and parses it as "endless opportunities to transform ourselves by expanding our imaginations." It is about the development of a skill we have been endowed with rather than a fixed relation to an imagined Reality. It is about the immaterialist imagination story being a better story than the materialist Reality story. It is a story about our freedom rather than a story about our containment. It is a story which says that:

"human beings do not have a nature to be understood, but rather a history to be reinterpreted. They do not have a place in a universal scheme of things, nor a special relation to the ruling powers of the universe. But they are capable of increasingly rich and imaginative self-descriptions."

Life, as in a previously anarchist friendly description of it that I gave elsewhere, is the endowment to be able to preserve that same life. It comes with certain skills and abilities – as it must if it is to last very long or amount to anything. The story being exegeted here says that the power of the imagination is not the least of these skills and abilities and is the wellspring of anything to be dwelt on or thought about.

This has taken us through two of Rorty's three lectures. But we have one still to go, that which completes his argument. Here he begins by reminding us that:

"Narrative philosophers... agree with Emerson that 'there is no circumference to us' and with Hegel that philosophy is, at best, its time held in thought. They agree with Wittgenstein that there are no meanings of words to be analyzed, but only uses of words to be described—uses that are, and should be, in constant change. There are no universal and necessary truths to be discovered, but only social practices to be accepted or rejected."

This is an acceptable short-form version of Rorty's linguistified Pragmatism, one he repeated over several decades in classrooms, lecture theatres, periodicals, journals and books. It is what drew me to him, 25 years ago as I write, in the first place. Thinking back now, it is exactly because of the imaginative way he put this – and filled out its meaning and consequences in papers addressing thinkers modern and not so modern as well as the Western Philosophical Tradition as a whole – that I became enchanted by it. Primarily, that was because it seemed to me, first, to make sense and to be relatively clear and easy to understand, but also, second, to be of use to the project I was then attempting, conceived, at first, as a kind of anti-realist take on the Historical Jesus. What Rorty (and the other philosopher I gravitated towards at that time – Nietzsche) helped me see, is that this character is a matter of what people do with him and so a matter of what they

imagine about him rather than it being about our relation to a possibly ineffable realist version of him – Jesus the Reality (which, as stated above, doesn't exist). Ironically, at that time (which is almost exactly the time when Rorty delivered the lectures I am now interacting with) I did not so obviously make the link with "imagination" and with that as being the key skill under articulation (although my previously discussed *Posthistorical Jesus Reader* would give evidence that, over the years, that changed). I guess some realisations take a few years to happen. I certainly would not then have made the Rortian connection with Romanticism and its imaginal impetus (and I couldn't have from this lecture series since these lectures were only published posthumously in 2016). But I can now:

"Romanticism tells us that reason would have had nothing to do—that we would have had nothing to think about—had imagination not been at work. Pragmatism tells us that imagination should not be allowed to interfere with reason's activities. Once an activity of reason becomes a social practice, such as mathematics, experimental science, or constitutional jurisprudence, it becomes self-regulating, and should be granted autonomy. It is one thing for an imaginative genius to suggest that we might play a different game, but quite another to disrupt the game presently being played by making illegal moves."

Rorty is here wanting to marry Romanticism, his imaginal bit, to Pragmatism, his reasonable bit, in some vision of a harmonious marriage and to allow each partner in the marriage to have their space and their role. But I wonder, in putting it this way, if Rorty was familiar with William Webb Ellis? William Webb Ellis was a nineteenth century English Anglican clergyman who, by tradition, has been credited as the inventor of rugby football while a pupil at Rugby School. According to legend, Webb Ellis illegally picked up the ball and ran with it during a school football match in 1823, a move not allowed in that football

otherwise known as soccer, thus creating the "rugby" style of play (where one runs with the ball and can pass it by hand) which went on to become a new game in its own right (with two codes, league and union) that exists internationally to this day. We might imagine that this was an act of imagination, to pick up the ball and run with it, one which "disrupts the game", and, if perhaps lesser known people in less influential social circles had done this before, it took this specific act of genius in this more elite location to create new games to play. So I don't agree with Rorty that games cannot be disrupted. I imagine that some games *should* be disrupted. And I put our difference on this down to something I shall not be discussing in this chapter, Rorty's bourgeois liberal politics (the major thing I dislike about his ideas much as he would say the same of Nietzsche's preference for a version of aristocracy which despises "the herd") which are fundamentally opposed to my more insurrectionary politics. That difference would go both ways, incidentally, and he would be equally dismissive of my politics had he ever been aware of them. But this difference is otherwise almost entirely irrelevant to the current discussion.

In Rorty's continuing story Romanticism plays an important part since it plays up the influence of, and need for, the imagination. I am reminded here, by spurious connection, of section 808 of Walter Kaufmann's translation of Nietzsche's notebooks called *The Will to Power*. In this note Nietzsche eulogises love as that which has the power to transform its object into the beloved. Nietzsche goes out of his way to say that this is not something superficial or inconsequential: it is an act which actually transforms how something is, or can be, imagined and it has definitive consequences, consequences which are more than adequately experienced should one fall out of love with the same beloved once again. This, I now see under Rorty's tutelage by writing, is a romantic move on Nietzsche's part. Love in this passage is an imaginative act and imagination transforms and transfigures with consequences, indeed, with ultimate consequence. Human beings can be imagined

to do (and to have done) all sorts of things because of the imagination involved in love. (*Romeo and Juliet* is just one fiction of this that comes to mind.)

Rorty contrasts this transformative and consequential picture of the imagination that comes from the Romanticists with Isaiah Berlin's vision of "the jigsaw puzzle view of the human situation". (Berlin has written an influential book on the Romanticists and regards their ideas as important and influential.) This view is really just another imaginary of the Platonic-analytic-realist view that Rorty has been criticising throughout his lectures, one in which, under this scheme, reality is imagined as a puzzle and so there can only be one way to put the pieces together correctly and so get reality right. Novelty is here neither required nor requested. The picture the puzzle makes when complete is both fixed in advance and set for all time. All we need do is figure out what goes where according to some pre-determined occurrence. Doing this, we will know what the world was really like all along.

But, of course, this is an imaginary. It is not something to which we are, by some constantly occurring fact of nature or reality or existence, subject, even if it is something to which we can become subject (or enchanted) by the conjuring of others. We can simply ignore it. The Rortian prescription is that we should. We can do better. When I first read this lecture, in fact, I immediately had visions of puzzles which can change and morph into different pictures meaning that the pieces change and fit together in different ways. Material puzzles can't do this – but imaginary ones can. Rorty himself in fact goes on to say what Berlin ascribes to Friedrich Schiller, the idea that "ideals are not to be discovered at all, but to be invented, not to be found but to be generated as art is generated." Somewhere in Northampton I can imagine Alan Moore sagely nodding.

Rorty adds that:

"I have been arguing in these lectures that all the historicist arguments that can be invoked to back up Schiller's claim about the origin of moral and political concepts can be applied to the origins of... other concepts. In the two hundred or so years since Schiller wrote, historicism has gradually spilled over from moral and political philosophy into philosophy of science, epistemology, and philosophy of language.

The result is the tension I have described between philosophers who search for universal and necessary truth and those who tell stories."

Rorty, thus, historicises all thought and not, as in a section above, simply historical thought. Thoughts have histories and historically contingent reasons for their invention and deployment. At the very least they have situations or contexts. What they come from is a set of circumstances that didn't have to be what they are but became so anyway. We can't actually ever be very specific about from where, or why, they did come. But we can usually say that they did as part of a story which imagines to explain or justify it. At least in retrospect. And, as hinted at above with Emerson, it's not as if this is ever likely to stop for it is an engine of our existence. As Rorty says in his final lecture of this series, "imagination keeps proposing new candidates for belief and new things to desire." In the terms of Berlin's metaphor, IT KEEPS WANTING TO CHANGE THE PICTURE THE PUZZLE MAKES AND SO HOW THE PIECES FIT TOGETHER – OR EVEN WHAT PIECES WE NEED TO CONSTRUCT THE PUZZLE AT ALL.

Rorty's historicist point is that, in fact, we will always need to imagine our own picture and so decide what pieces are needed and how they fit together: imagination goes all the way

down; there is nothing but conjuring; enchantment with language is all that there is. Or put it another way: if you cannot imagine then you cannot do anything – and what you especially cannot do is change. “One can change the course of inquiry either by redescribing what one is talking about or by redescribing what one hopes to get out of inquiring about it.” But there is no change without imagination. In this, on the narrative of Rorty’s story, imagination is simply novelty not a new route to Truth or Knowledge or Reality. It still remains for us to decide, for whatever reasons we come up with, whether what was imagined was useful or not. But this does point up what Rorty calls in his final lecture “the priority of imagination to reason”. And, thus, “the only hope for the future lies in the human imagination”, in something coming “from nothing”, from the “Ideaspace”, from “the Immaterialia”.

7. On Nothing

“And this is why I can heroically call myself—along with being a poet—‘a truly, deeply unhappy individual.’ I know I am a luminous point that goes uselessly through the gloomy futility of all things. And it is this, my conscious desperation, this my awareness of the futility of being, that makes me deeply love Life.” (Renzo Novatore – “Spiritual Perversity”)

We now interrupt this story I have been telling to bring you another one:

“I Have Based My Affair on Nothing.

What is not supposed to be my affair! Above all, the good cause, then God's cause, the cause of humanity, of truth, of freedom, of humaneness, of justice; furthermore, the cause of my people, my prince, my fatherland; finally even the cause of mind and a thousand other

causes. Only my own cause is never supposed to be my affair. 'Down with the egoist who only thinks of himself!'

Let's see then how they deal with their cause, those for whose cause we are supposed to work, sacrifice ourselves, and be filled with enthusiasm.

You are able to report thoroughly on God, since you have investigated 'the depths of divinity' for thousands of years, and have seen into its heart, so that you can probably tell us how God himself deals with 'God's cause;' which we are called to serve. Nor do you conceal the Lord's activities. Now what is his cause? Does he make an alien cause, the cause of truth or love, his own, as he expects us to do? You are outraged at this misunderstanding, and you inform us that God's cause is indeed the cause of truth and love, but this cause cannot be called alien to him, because God himself is truth and love; you are outraged at the assumption that God might resemble us poor worms by promoting an alien cause as his own. 'Should God promote the cause of truth, if he is not himself truth? He cares only for his own cause, but since he is all in all, therefore all is his affair! But we, we are not all in all, and our affair is utterly small and contemptible; therefore, we must 'serve a higher cause.' - Now it is clear, God cares only for what is his, deals only with himself thinks only of himself and looks out only for himself; woe to all that is not well-pleasing to him. He serves nothing higher and satisfies only himself. His cause is - a purely egoistic affair.

How does it stand with humanity, whose cause we should make ours? Is its cause perhaps that of another, and does humanity serve a higher cause? No, humanity sees only itself, humanity wants to promote only humanity, humanity itself is its own cause. So that it develops, it lets people struggle away in its service, and when they have accomplished what

humanity needs, it throws them on the dung-heap of history in its gratitude. Isn't humanity's cause - a purely egoistic affair?

I don't at all need to show that everything that tries to push its cause over on us is concerned only with itself, and not with us, only with its well-being, and not with ours. Just have a look for yourselves at the rest. Do truth, freedom, humaneness, justice want anything else than that you get enthusiastic about them and serve them?

They all do exceptionally well when they are zealously revered. Take a look at the nation, which is defended by devoted patriots. The patriots fall in bloody battle or in the fight against hunger and need; what does the nation say about that? With the manure of these corpses, the nation becomes a 'blossoming nation.' Individuals have died for 'the great cause of the nation,' and the nation sends some words of thanks after them - and profits from it. I would call this lucrative egoism.

But just look at the Sultan who so lovingly cares for 'his own.' Isn't he pure selflessness itself, and doesn't he sacrifice himself hour after hour for his own? Yes, of course, for 'his own.' Try just once to show yourself not as his own, but as your own; for escaping his egoism, you will take a trip to his jail. The sultan has based his affair on nothing but himself; he is for himself the all in all and the only one, and tolerates no one who dares not to be his own.

And won't you learn from these shining examples that the egoist gets on best? I, for my part, take a lesson from them, and instead of serving those great egoists unselfishly anymore, I would prefer to be the egoist myself. God and humanity have based their affair

on nothing, on nothing but themselves. I likewise base my affair on myself, this I who just like God am the nothing of all others, this I who am my all, this I who am the Unique.

If God, if humanity, as you affirm, have enough content in themselves to be all in all to themselves, then I feel that I would lack it even less, and that I would have no complaint to make about my 'emptiness.' I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself create everything as creator.

Away, then, with every cause that is not completely my affair. You think that at least the 'good cause' must be my affair? Which good, which bad? I am myself my own affair, and I am neither good nor bad. Neither makes any sense to me.

The divine is God's affair; the human cause is 'humanity's.' My affair is neither the divine nor the human; it is not the good, the true, the just, the free, etc., but only my own, and it is not general, but is - unique, as I am unique.

For me, there is nothing greater than me!...

THE UNIQUE

Pre-Christian and Christian times pursue opposite goals; the former wants to idealize the real, the latter to realize the ideal; the former seeks the 'holy spirit;' the latter the 'glorified body.' Thus, the former closes with insensitiveness to the real, with 'contempt for the world'; the latter will end with the casting off of ideals, with 'contempt for the spirit.'

The opposition between the real and the ideal is an irreconcilable one, and the one can never become the other: if the ideal became the real, it would no longer be the ideal; and if the real became the ideal, there would only be the ideal, and the real wouldn't be at all. The opposition between the two is not to be overcome unless somebody destroys them both. Only in this 'somebody,' the third party, does the opposition find its end; but otherwise idea and reality will never meet. The idea cannot be realized in such a way that it remains an idea, but only if it dies as an idea; and the same applies to the real.

But now we have before us in the ancients, the followers of the idea, and in the moderns, the followers of reality. Neither gets away from this opposition, and both only languish, the one side after the spirit, and when this yearning of the ancient world was satisfied and this spirit seemed to have come, the other side immediately again after the secularization of this spirit, which must forever remain a 'pious wish.'

The pious wish of the ancients was sanctity, the pious wish of the moderns is embodiment. But as antiquity had to go under, if its longing was to be satisfied (because it consisted only of this longing), so also embodiment can never be attained within the ring of Christianity. As the train of sanctification or purification runs through the old world (ablutions, etc.), so that of becoming flesh runs through the Christian world: God plummets down into this world, becomes flesh, and wants to redeem it, i.e., fill it with himself; but since he is 'the idea' or 'the spirit;' in the end, people (for example, Hegel) introduce the idea into everything, into the world, and prove 'that the idea, that reason, is in everything.' What the heathen Stoics put up as 'the wise man' corresponds in today's learning to 'the human being;' the latter, like the former, a fleshless being. The unreal 'wise man;' this bodiless 'holy one' of the Stoics, became an actual person, a bodily 'holy one;' in the God made flesh; the non-actual 'human being;' the bodiless I, will become actual in the embodied I, in me.

The question of 'God's existence' winds its way through Christianity; taken up over and over again, it bears witness that the urge for existence, embodiment, personality, actuality, continually occupied the mind, because it never found an adequate solution. The question of God's existence finally disappeared, but only to arise again in the proposition that the 'divine' has existence (Feuerbach). But this too has no existence, and the last resort, that the 'purely human' can be realized, won't offer protection for much longer. No idea has existence, because none is capable of embodiment. The scholastic controversy over realism and nominalism has the same content; in short, this weaves itself through all Christian history, and cannot end in it.

The Christian world is working to realize ideas in the individual relations of life, in the institutions and laws of the church and the state; but they are reluctant and always keep something back unmaterialized (unrealizable). Still it restlessly chases after this materiality, regardless of how much embodiment is always lacking.

For the realizer lays little on realities, but places everything on the same being realizations of the idea. Thus, he is constantly re-examining whether the realized, in truth, has the idea, its kernel, dwelling in it; and as he tests the real, at the same time he tests the idea, whether it can be realized in the way he thinks it, or whether he thinks it incorrectly, and therefore makes it unworkable.

As existences, family, state, etc. are no longer supposed to concern the Christian; unlike the ancients, Christians are not supposed to sacrifice themselves for these 'divine things;' but rather they should be used to bring the spirit to life in them. The actual family has become unimportant, and from it an ideal one, which would be the 'truly real' one, is supposed to arise, a sacred family, blessed by God, or, to the liberal way of thinking, a 'rational' family.

Among the ancients, family, state, fatherland, etc. are divine as existing things; among the moderns, they still await divinity, are sinful as they exist, and still have to be 'redeemed,' i.e., must become truly real. This has the following meaning: The family, etc., are not the existing and real, but the divine, the idea, is existing and real; whether this family will make itself real by taking in the truly real, the idea, is still debatable. It is not the task of the individual to serve the family as the divine, but, on the contrary, to serve the divine and feed the ungodly family to it, i.e., to subjugate everything in the name of the idea, to fly the banner of the idea over everything, to bring the idea to real efficacy.

But since the concern of Christianity, like that of antiquity, is for the divine, this is where they always come out from their opposite paths. At the end of heathenism, the divine becomes otherworldly; at the end of Christianity, this-worldly. Antiquity does not succeed in putting it completely outside of the world, and when Christianity accomplishes this task, the divine immediately longs to return to the world and wants to 'redeem' the world. But within Christianity, it does not and cannot reach the point where the divine as this-worldly would actually itself become the worldly: there is enough left which, as the 'bad,' irrational, random, egoistic, the 'worldly' in the bad sense, does and must keep itself unpenetrated. Christianity begins with God becoming man, and it carries out its work of conversion and redemption throughout all time, to prepare a reception for God in all human beings and in everything human, and to penetrate everything with the spirit: it keeps to it, to prepare a place for the 'spirit.'

When the accent was finally placed on the human being or humanity, it was again the idea that was 'called eternal': 'The human being never dies!' Now they thought that they had found the reality of the idea: The human is the I of history, of world history; it is he, this ideal, which actually develops, i.e., realizes, himself. He is the actually real, the embodied

one, because history is his body, in which individuals are just the limbs. Christ is the I of world history, even the pre-Christian ones; in the modern perspective, it is the human being, the image of Christ has developed into a human image: the human being as such, the quintessential human being, is the 'center' of history. In 'humanity' the imaginary beginning returns; because 'the human being' is as imaginary as Christ is. The 'human being,' as the I of world history, closes the cycle of Christian perspectives.

The magic circle of Christianity would be broken, if the tension between existence and calling, i.e., between me as I am and me as I'm supposed to be, stopped. It persists only as the longing of the idea for its embodiment and disappears with the diminishing distinction between the two. Only if the idea remains - the idea as human being, or humanity as a bodiless idea - does Christianity still exist. The embodied idea, the embodied or 'perfected' spirit, floats before the Christian as 'the end of days' or as the 'purpose of history'; it is not present to him.

The individual can only participate in the founding of the Kingdom of God, or, according to the modern depiction of the same thing, in the development and history of humanity; and only insofar as he participates in it, does a Christian, or in the modern expression, human value befit him; in all other respects, he is dust and a worm-bag.

That the individual is a world history for himself, and possesses his property in the rest of the world's history, this goes beyond what is Christian. For the Christian world history is the higher thing, because it is the history of Christ or 'of the human being'; to the egoist only his history has value, because he only wants to develop himself, not the idea of humanity; not God's plan, not the intentions of providence, not freedom, etc. He doesn't look upon himself as a tool of the idea or a vessel of God, he recognizes no calling, he doesn't imagine that he

*exists to further the development of humanity and that he has to contribute his mite to it, but rather he enjoys life, unconcerned about how well or badly humanity may fare from it. If it didn't allow the misunderstanding that a state of nature is to be praised, one might be reminded of Lenau's *The Three Gypsies*. - What, am I in the world for this purpose, to realize ideas? To do my part perhaps toward the realization of the idea of the 'state' through my citizenship, or to bring the idea of the family into an existence through my marriage, as husband and father? How I dispute such a calling! I live as little after a calling as the flower grows and gives fragrance after a calling.*

The ideal 'human being' is realized when the Christian view is overturned in the statement: 'I, this unique, am the human being.' The conceptual question: 'What is the human being?' - has then changed into the personal question: 'Who is the human being?' With 'what' one looks for the concept in order to realize it; with 'who' there is no longer any question at all, but the answer present personally in the questioner himself: the question itself answers itself.

*They say of God, 'Names name you not.' This is true of me: no concept expresses me, nothing that is said to be my essence exhausts me; they are only names. They also say of God that he is perfect and has no calling to strive for perfection. This too is true of me alone. I am owner of my power, and I am so when I know myself as unique. In the unique the owner himself returns into his creative nothing, from which he is born. Every higher essence over me, be it God, be it the human being, weakens the feeling of my uniqueness, and only pales before the sun of this awareness. If I base my affair on myself, the unique, then it stands on the transient, the mortal creator, who consumes himself, and I may say: I have based my affair on nothing." (From Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*)*

You have just read (if you have just read) the beginning and end section of Max Stirner's book *The Unique and Its Property*, a curious and possibly unique book which is said to speak to something called "egoism" and which became popular with some kinds of anarchist towards the end of the nineteenth century. (Emma Goldman, for example, refers to Stirner approvingly and explicitly in her correspondence.) In it, such anarchists (sometimes calling themselves "individualist" or "egoist" anarchists) found a basis for their anarchism, an anarchism based on themselves and not on imagined causes or ideas (such as God or State or Humanity) become causes. Stirner makes the point at the beginning and end of his book, as can be seen in the excerpts I have reproduced, that he has "based his affair on nothing" – and he further refers multiple times to the "creative nothing". This he relates to "uniqueness" and the distinguishing factor of a human being for Stirner appears to be that each one of us is the only example of ourselves. If we seek to prosper that which is uniquely ourselves, thinks Stirner, it will surely go better for us than in a world of causes in which powers (like God, Church, State, morality, humanity) seek to dominate us. Perhaps the key idea of Stirner's book is that we should hold nothing sacred. It gives his book a decidedly anti-authoritarian flavour. I personally found this idea so important when writing my book *Black Flag* a few years ago that I made "hold nothing sacred" my first of what was seven articles of Jolly Roger's Anarchy.

Yet another way to take Stirner's book is as is said in the final paragraph of the text. Here we see that "words are just words" but what counts is that "I am the owner of my power" and this is most true when one's uniqueness is recognised. Here is when we return to our "creative nothing" which I am going to equate with THE HUMAN IMAGINATION and our own unique ability to imagine and actualise a world in human relations of our own. This appears to be a refusal to be objectified, named and so ruled by others, brought into their idealist and imaginary schemes under the auspices of exactly such imaginary things as

“State” or “Morality” or “Humanity” or “God”. These things are all ideas and so all equally imagined but, of course, in the light of all I have said so far in this chapter, that is hardly inconsequential for people have the damaging habit of believing (and believing in) the ideas and imaginings of others, submitting to mental slaveries which become material slaveries. Stirner, however, essentially says, by way of riposte, that we are all unique, all have our own power and can all imagine from the nothing that we are all by ourselves. And why shouldn't we? We would not be dominated, says Stirner in his fuller text, if we did not just give over our obedience to such collectivising, centralising and authoritarian ideas so easily. Instead, we should all be examples of our own, unique insurrections, all put our creative nothings to use as examples of our uniqueness and our power. We should act for ourselves in a world in which nothing is sacred (that anything is “sacred” is pure imagination) and in which we can imagine ourselves from nothing. If we did, who could dominate then in a world in which everyone imagined and actualised themselves, for themselves?

The best example I know of someone who actually did this, and who consequently took Stirner at his word in this, is Renzo Novatore. Renzo Novatore was the pen-name of an Italian born Abele Rizieri Ferrari in a small village near the north-eastern coast of Italy in the region of La Spezia. Whilst still a child he exerted his own will upon his life by quitting school aged around 11 (i.e. pretty much as soon as he had managed to develop an amount of self-awareness and ego of his own). His father tried to get him to work on the family farm instead but Novatore didn't want to do this either so he would steal produce from the farm and sell it in order to buy books and then find somewhere quiet in his rural location to learn things for himself. As an autodidact he became familiar with the writings of Nietzsche, Stirner, Baudelaire and Schopenhauer as well as the plays of Ibsen and the writings of Oscar Wilde (besides several others). Novatore essentially created himself

from his own learning and his own, self-directed use of his imagination, becoming a self-taught poet and philosopher, as can be seen from his own writings.

From about age 18 Novatore considered himself an anarchist but he wasn't the sort of anarchist who only considered himself so in his head. By age 20 he had been arrested and imprisoned for setting fire to a church. A year later he went missing because the police wanted him for various thefts and robberies. He was further arrested around this time for vandalism. By his mid twenties Novatore was writing for anarchist publications but was drafted into the Italian army during the First World War, disrupting this activity. He would eventually become a deserter and was sentenced to death in his absence. Consequently, he left his home village, going underground, and propagated armed actions against the state. In mid 1919 a snitch turned him in and he was sentenced to ten years in jail. Fortunately, a general amnesty in Italy a few months later saw him released again. On release, he immediately rejoined with some anarchist colleagues of like mind and re-engaged with his insurrectionary lifestyle and ideas once more. This included, in 1920, an armed assault on an Italian naval barracks in order to obtain supplies from the arms depository there. He was arrested again during this action and imprisoned once more for a few months.

Then, one day in the summer of 1922, three truck loads of fascists, who owed allegiance to the soon to become Italian Prime Minister, Benito Mussolini, pulled up outside Novatore's house where he lived with his wife and two sons. They had clearly arrived to get him and surrounded the house. Novatore, who was habitually armed, fought off the fascists with home made hand grenades and escaped into the forest, going underground yet again. But Novatore's luck was not to last much longer. When entering a tavern near Genoa near the end of November of that year with a colleague, he was engaged in

gunfire by three carabinieri (Italian military police) who had followed them inside. Novatore was shot dead, his associate killing his killer before fleeing himself. Novatore's life of anarchy was over. As we shall see in his writings, which I intend to examine next, he had asked for no quarter in his life and he had given none. So we can only imagine that he died happy, being his authentic self.

In writing, Novatore was both poetic and a rhetorician. He painted sometimes lurid and fantastical pictures in words of the world he imagined to live in, and to live out, as well as the world of the bourgeois and the proletarian which he despised. He would also debate with other anarchists – being an egoist himself and dismissive of communist anarchism propagated in Italy by such notables as Camillo Berneri and Errico Malatesta. Novatore called himself many things in print but “anarchist”, “nihilist”, “iconoclast” and “atheist” were probably the most common of them – and often in series. It is easy to see, in reading what has survived of his work, that he took up Max Stirner's ideas about “the unique” and “the creative nothing” and “holding nothing sacred” extremely seriously. One of his most famous works is, in fact, called “Toward the Creative Nothing”. In it, as in pretty much everything else he ever wrote that we are still aware of, he draws a sharp divide between himself and others, especially the bourgeois and the proles, and eulogises a class of “solitaries of the idea” or “great vagabonds of the spirit”, imagining a category of people who are outsiders, wanderers, outlaws, those who are the enemies of the State, of God, Church and Morality, of Humanity and liberal politics which he sees as secularised Christianity (after Nietzsche and Stirner). Novatore, pre-eminently, proclaims his desire (rather than demanding the right) to fight for his own imaginary of the world and to do so by his own direct action – a direct taking up of all that Stirner had taught in *The Unique and Its Property*. I now, with some pleasure, I might add, go through some examples of this in what remains to us of Novatore's work (polemical as it almost always is).

A key to Novatore's mindset begins with one of a small group of collected "thoughts and sayings" published in 1917. Here Novatore writes, "The one who has found himself again hears songs of freedom and victory echoing in the depths of his spirit." This presents the imaginary of a personal authenticity and, indeed, of self-actualisation as if one could know no more satisfying feeling than the feeling of knowing who one is in oneself beyond outside coercion of it. But this strikes at least this reader as not simply a singular event but as an ongoing process. It speaks of walking in the reality of finding oneself and finding it again every day. It speaks exactly, in the context of Renzo Novatore's life, of a self-actualisation *process*, an *habitation* to self-actualisation.

This is fleshed out much more fully in the rhetorical essay "Cry of Rebellion" published in *Cronaca Libertaria* in August of 1917. Here we get a much more fully formed blast of Novatore's rhetoric and the values which inform it. Novatore, in general, might be said to be against any and all "idealist faiths", whether religious or secular (i.e. of Church or State) and this is in evidence here in an essay which finds in the deaths of Socrates and Christ meagre fare for "the new human beings" to feast upon. (Here Novatore favours, instead, the anti-civilisationalist and Cynic Diogenes and sees in him a better example.) And so, when it comes to considering revolutions, Novatore observes that they all become domesticated in the end, having normally been driven by "phantoms" (i.e. sacred ideas, what Stirner in his book calls, negatively, "spooks") which are little other than imaginaries, idols, things one becomes paralysed, because enchanted, by. Novatore, on the other hand, considers himself "the killer of phantoms" and he wishes to put absolutely no sacred idea system in place over people, whether tyranny, nationality or equality. So he writes:

"I don't consider it hard to understand that in every form of society there must be a 'system', indeed, this system, the best of the best: Equality! But every 'sacred' system and all that is Sacred, whether divinely or humanly, demand renunciation and humiliation from me, the Individual. But that's not all. Because every form of society, born from the fragments of the old one that fell resoundingly into the void, has the conviction that it is the only perfect one. And it is precisely this dogma of perfection that drives it to be so utterly reactionary toward the restless Rebel who does not at all intend to bow before the new God."

Here the basic point is that systems, of any sort, most of which regard themselves as sacred and so as authorities, do not regard the impudent individual who imagines to rule over themselves lightly. Such systems demand, first, obedience but, more important, the fealty which this obedience, becoming habitual, is to signify and manifest. Now it is not here that Novatore, writing in the year of the Russian Revolution, is against revolutions. It is just that his personal revolution is so revolutionary that it is even a revolution against revolutions themselves! He writes:

"I am a revolutionary guided only by the vast and uncontrollable impulse of MY expansion of will and potential."

There is no phantom guiding me, but rather there I am, walking. There is no chimerical dream of a perfect society of universal human redemption, but rather there is the absolute need for my potential affirmation before other potentialities. God, the State, Society, Humanity, etc., have their own cause for themselves. If I don't want to subjugate myself to God's cause, I am a 'sinner'. If I don't want to submit to the State, Society, Humanity, I am a 'wicked man', a 'criminal', a 'delinquent'.

But what is 'sin'? What is 'crime'?

Here again, I don't think there is any need for a long and complicated digression to analyze all this, since even children must know by now that the most serious sin that you can commit against divinity is to mock it, not obey it, desecrate it, and deny it. In short, desecrating what is divinely and humanly 'sacred' is the greatest 'sin', the greatest 'crime'."

"Divinely and humanly sacred": Renzo's revolution is not just against gods and states: IT IS AGAINST THE GOD IDEA ITSELF, THE IDEA THAT THERE COULD BE ANY GOD OVER AND ABOVE US OF ANY KIND, AGAINST THE SACRED ITSELF. Novatore wishes to reduce all to rubble and to begin *from nothing*, which is to say, from himself in a world in which the dominating material and immaterial constructions of others are to be destroyed in a concept of "eternal war" against whichever system of thought attempts to dominate next and so attempts to make itself sacred. Of course, Novatore was writing this whilst the men of Europe were flinging themselves, pointlessly, out of trenches and into killing fields and fighting for... what exactly? Novatore comments:

"Today, you sacrifice yourself in blood-soaked trenches for a cause that is not your own. Tomorrow you may sacrifice yourself in lands made bloody by Revolution in order to later allow a new parasitic and corroding worm to rise on the seas of blood that streamed out in hot steaming spurts from your bronze veins so that a new idol could be raised up to sit over you just like the old God."

Nothing will change, thinks Novatore. People will just exchange one boss for another boss, one cause not their own for another cause not their own. "You still want to go on living on your knees," he adds, "But I have understood life. And anyone who understands

life cannot live on his knees.” But this is both a material AND immaterial battle and he lays this out in narrative form:

“I have even understood all the traps that the owners of all this have set for me. When they saw me march boldly to the conquest of my life, armed with all my uninhibited potentiality, they placed before my eager eyes all of their ridiculous and insane phantoms. They tried to terrorize me with the hobgoblins of the ‘sacred’, but since I, the Iconoclast, the Impious one, scorn and mock all that is ‘sacred’ and ‘consecrated’, and since, like Armida (a character in the epic poem Jerusalem Delivered by the Italian poet Torquato Tasso), I destroy the palace in which once I had to suffer enchantment, they threw off their sacred mask and launched themselves against me, imposing the most extreme against me.

That was the day, oh rabble, that I had the true revelation of what life is and what place my Uniqueness would have in this. Now I live on my feet. My eye no longer knows sleep. I recognize no one’s rights against me. Only force can defeat me now, not phantoms. I said, only force can defeat me. But I also use it. I no longer ask anyone for anything. I am no beggar. I only appropriate everything that I have empowered myself to appropriate through the capacity of my potentiality. My revolution already started a long time ago. From the moment I knew life, I took up MY weapons and declared MY war. I struggle for a cause that is my own. No other cause can interest me anymore.”

But what then of people in general in this new scheme of things, this imaginary from nothing of oneself in the world which is aimed to counteract abstract and arbitrary collective enchantments? Novatore seemingly only respects those of like mind and sees no place for those who exist only to acknowledge, and worship, a Lord:

"But what are you then, oh rabble, if not the blind, unconscious, begging mass that launches yourself against me in defence of your Lord? Listen to me, oh rabble, you must vanish as such, you must have no place in the theatre of new life. Do you sneer? Are you maybe lashing out at me? Could it be that with the blows of my lash I have succeeded in awakening an inner residue of pride in you that slept hidden in the remote corners of your mind that has been servile for centuries? Already in the distance you can hear the war trumpet sound, announcing the invincible attacks of the Unique ones against the phantoms: the State, Society, God, Humanity..."

You turn pale and flee, dragging all your satellites into the abyss of the eternal void; and the rebellious phalange of Free Spirits and Iconoclasts advances into the stormy sky of the Future!"

It is noteworthy here, then, that Novatore had headed this essay with an epigram credited to one Max Stirner:

"Dedicated to the rabble.

*The fall of peoples and of humanity
will be the signal of my rising."*

Novatore marks his literary territory by describing himself, and those like him, in distinctive ways. These are not ways which merely assign identities to crudely drawn groups of people, however. In fact, Novatore thinks of himself and his associates as those who imagine, and so think, differently in a qualitative sense in which how you think and what you can imagine is the important thing. Such as these are "Intellectual Vagabonds",

the title of a further piece published by *Cronaca Libertaria*. Paraphrasing, summarising and freely interpreting Stirner for himself here at the start of this piece, Novatore writes:

"All who appear suspicious, hostile and dangerous to the good bourgeois, Stirner said, could be brought together under the name 'vagabond'; every vagabond way of life displeases the bourgeoisie. And there are also intellectual vagabonds, to whom the hereditary dwelling place of their fathers seems too cramped and oppressive for them to be content any more with its restricted space and so go to find more space and light far away. Instead of remaining curled up in the family cave stirring the ashes of moderate opinion, instead of accepting what has given comfort and relief to thousands of generations as irrefutable truth, they go beyond all the boundaries of tradition and run wild with their impudent criticism and untamed mania for doubt. These extravagant vagabonds form the class of the unstable, the restless, the volatile, formed from the proletariat; and when left to give voice to their unsettled natures, they are called unruly, hot heads, fanatics..."

Oh, intellectual vagabonds! Pale, unrepentant subverters! The ones who gallop on and on through the endless regions of their capricious imaginations that create new things.

While speaking to them, Zarathustra once said: The earth is still free for great spirits. There are still many harbours for solitary spirits and their kindred, around whom the aroma of tranquil seas drifts. Life is still free, free for the free spirit. Then he continued: Only where the state ceases to exist does the man who is not futile begin: that is where the hymn to the necessary begins, the refrain that is not uniform. There, where the state ceases to exist... but watch a bit, my brothers: don't you see the rainbow over there and the bridges to the overhuman?"

Here we divine that the “intellectual vagabonds” are “subverters” and destroyers and “outlaws” but in this they “create new things”. Nietzsche’s figure of Zarathustra is brought into the argument as one who praises “the free spirit” (which, in German, would also refer to a free mind or free thought as the German word for spirit – Geist – also means mind and thought too. In German a free thinker and a free spirit is equally a “Freigeist”). It is evident from this piece that Novatore imagines such a Stirner and Nietzsche inspired free thinker to be one who wilfully destroys the prevailing collective narratives of others. Such people need no teachers but teach themselves. Such people “scorn the good and the just” as “the beginning of the end”. This might come across to your average bourgeois, or even your average proletarian, as a nihilist creed par excellence for it delights entirely in its destructive mission and is, indeed, consumed by it. But how can you be free whilst the prison which has, heretofore, constituted your world yet stands? As Novatore writes in the piece “Toward the Conquest of New Dawns” found in the publication *Il Libertaria*:

“Show respect to the spirits that desire to decisively break free of everything that is the monstrous birth of the past and that resounds: present-day reality. Respect those who live in the Future! Our gaze is intensely focused on the gates of the blessed Isle that rises beyond good and evil. That is where the wild, green flowers of our most beautiful hope begin to bloom! And there, toward that Isle, is where the golden bow of our ship eagerly turns!”

It would seem to me that if Novatore is guilty of any crime then it is the “crime” of taking notions like autonomy and agency and free association, imagined good in many circles, entirely seriously and plotting his own course to make them lived realities. In doing so, he exposes the superficial hypocrisy of all who talk of liberty but have no intention of ever actually allowing it. Thus, we have the vision evident in Novatore’s piece “Wild Flowers”, again found in *Cronaca Libertaria*:

"... they are strange, wild flowers that arise from the nothing that creates..."

I like this image very much for it speaks to the flower which finds, from the capabilities that it has within itself by being what it is, a form of life, the necessary to simply grow and express its vitality in whatever circumstances it finds itself, a power of self-organisation and self-actualisation making the most of its situation to simply become itself, like a flower forcing its way between the cracks of concrete. What other imperative does life have but this? Novatore makes this will to life, growth, strength and vital beauty a criterion of the anarchist:

"Only those who have found themselves again after a long, hard desperate search and placed themselves on the margins of society, contemptuous and proud, denying anyone the right to judge them, are anarchists..."

Only those who, with impetuous violence, know how to appraise the rusty gates enclosing the house of the great lie where the lewd thieves of the I (god, state, society, humanity) have arranged to meet, in order to take their greatest treasure back from clammy, greedy hands adorned with the false gold of love, pity, and civilization, from the baleful predators, can consider themselves lord and master of himself and call themselves anarchists."

You see, for Novatore, it is never about the half measure, it is always about pushing on all the way through until one finds the really radical idea (usually this will be the one people, in general, baulk at as "going too far" – which is no more and no less than a symbol of their timidity and inability to think in new ways beyond the generally acceptable). In fact, Novatore finishes this piece with exactly an example of this:

"The first human being who said: 'There is no god,' was undoubtedly an athlete of human thought. But the one who limited himself to saying that: 'The god of the priest does not exist,' cheats through equivocation, leaving it sufficiently clear that he is a shady partisan who is already planning to kill people, perhaps with a new lie. Remain very suspicious of those who limit themselves to the mere negation of god."

It is never good enough merely to negate this or that particular example of a god (a specific, named version of it). One must negate THE GOD IDEA, a whole class of things, so that gods can never be imagined, or countenanced, ever again. Here we can see that what Novatore engages in is really THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THOUGHT, the creation of new imaginaries, which make old ones impossible and unnecessary. That, in fact, is why my story has led up to him (although I did not know it would when I began it).

I come to Novatore's longest work, *Toward the Creative Nothing*. This is a sort of poetic retelling of history and society which has Christianity and Democracy as its bad guys that sap the "Willful strength, barbarous individuality, free art, heroism, genius [and] poetry" of the story's good guys. It is a story of "I" against "the collective", of "the unique one" against "society". The point here is that, in this reading of history, the social mass is against the single one – and it must be. For it is a levelling phenomenon (as Stirner and Nietzsche both, in their way, also make plain) that cannot account for, or countenance, individual vitality or creativity. Society is the enemy of the individual that desires their own autonomy and agency. So here we find "bourgeois toads and proletarian frogs" that exist in "a common spiritual baseness", possessed by their democratic imaginings – or "the democratic Goose" as Novatore calls it. Democracy is here a "contamination" and an incarcerating vision that the democratic are unable to imagine themselves either beyond or out of. But they are united in one thing:

"Bourgeois and proletarian, though clashing over questions of class, of power and of the belly, still always remained united in common hatred against the great vagabonds of the spirit, against the solitaries of the idea. Against all those stricken by thought, against all those transfigured by a higher beauty."

It becomes clear as the story unfolds that the task of the individual is to smash and destroy the society that constrains them:

"Because it is from these ruins of god, society, family and humanity that the new human mind could be born flourishing and festive, that new human mind that—on the rubble of all the past—will sing the birth of the liberated man: the free and great 'I'."

This, it would seem clear enough, is imagined an action of freedom and liberty that leads to a new society of free individuals. Novatore imagines human life a matter of "movement" and "action" here, one in which "thought" and "ideas" cannot be artificially constrained:

"life is a movement, an action.

That pursues thought.

That yearns for thought.

That loves thought.

And this being walks, runs, bustles around.

Life wants to stir in the kingdom of ideas."

Here life is imagined the product of "high spiritual values" which "bourgeois-christian-plebian" society cannot abide. This is consequently a phenomenon of death. Novatore

imagines this a matter of thought and imagination for he seeks “the elevation of the human mind – transfiguring it and freeing it”. “Christianity”, “democracy” and “socialism” are imagined poisons to this mind. They do not have the imaginative power to create that kind of life which Novatore seeks. They are a spiritual poverty. Where democracy is a “goose”, “true free spirits, great vagabonds of the idea” are “eagles”. The text is written in a very “Zarathustrian” mode and, if one is familiar with Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, then one knows the terrain Novatore’s mind wanders through and the heights to which it would wish to rise. There is a lot of poetry here, poetry which eulogises “the unique” at the expense of “the bourgeois and the proletarian”. Human life is imagined as a battle of values (as, indeed, it is too in Nietzsche’s book). And those of mass society only drag people inevitably “toward the mud of all the trenches”.

The true tragedy of this is that the people in trenches were not fighting for their own ideas. They were fighting for others and for *their* ideas, both as automatons and as cannon fodder. They are people incapable of ideas of their own, those enchanted by others. They are told who their friend and their enemy is and act without thinking. And they still populate this world in their hundreds of millions today. “What an idiotic thing to die without knowing why,” Novatore laments. And the worst thing? War changed nothing. It came from a culture and an imaginary in which nothing was meant to change. “Where is the redemption from material slavery?” Novatore cries. Are these poor spiritual creatures who fight other people’s battles for them all we are? Where are those who can destroy this and “create a new history”? We live in “An abyss that can only be filled up with the corpse of slavery and that of authority.” The society and culture of the bourgeois and the proletarian only digs this abyss deeper.

But then a torch shines in the darkness, a signpost to the forenoon and away from “the age of obligation and slavery”:

“We are not the admirers of the ‘ideal man’ of ‘social rights’, but the proclaimers of the ‘actual individual’, enemy of social abstractions.

We fight for the liberation of the individual.

For the conquest of life.

For the triumph of our idea.

For the realization of our dreams.

And if our ideas are dangerous, it is because we are those who love to live dangerously.

And if our dreams are mad, it is because we are mad.

But our madness is supreme wisdom.

But our ideas are the heart of life; but our thoughts are the beacons of humanity.

And what the war has not done, revolution must do.

Because revolution is the fire of our will and a need of our solitary minds; it is an obligation of the libertarian aristocracy.

To create new ethical values.

To create new aesthetic values.

To communalize material wealth.

To individualize spiritual wealth.”

This is one of very few occasions Novatore talks about “communalising” – but talk about it he does. And it makes sense. Novatore’s imaginary is not one of rich and powerful tyrants who tyrannise the masses but of self-possessed individuals who think for themselves, live for themselves and act for themselves in a world in which true autonomy and agency are lived realities (which can only be if this is the case). He must logically be against

everything that hinders this. Novatore wants to “teach the poor the shame of their poverty, and the rich the shame of their wealth.” And “All that is called ‘material property’, ‘private property’, ‘exterior property’ needs to become what the sun, the light, the sky, the sea, the stars are for individuals.” Novatore distinguishes between “ethical and spiritual wealth” that is “invulnerable” and “the true property of individuals” – and “material wealth” which is very much vulnerable and certain to be violated. And the battle cry of this campaign is:

“We must set our endeavour to transform the revolution that advances into ‘anarchist crime’, in order to push humanity beyond the state, beyond socialism. Toward Anarchy!”

Once more here Novatore imagines the intellectual vagabond is a person of imaginary prodigiousness, one possessed of the mind that overcomes:

“our brain is a sparkling pyre where the great fire of thought crackles and burns in mad and joyful torments...”

We are anarchists. And individualists, and nihilists, and aristocrats.

Because we come from the mountains.

From close to the stars.”

Such as Novatore imagines are typically pyres burning in surrounding darkness that point the way to “the great noon”. Indeed:

“We have come to raise a forest of pyres upon the earth to illuminate it during the night which precedes the great noon...”

We want our minds to vibrate in a new dream...

Because we are the nihilists of social phantoms...

The abyss awaits us. We leap into it in the end: Toward the creative nothing."

This nihilism, for nihilism it is so proudly denominated, goes under the banner "all that is declared 'sacred' is a lie". The enemy here is all for whom "a law is 'sacred'; a society 'sacred'; a moral 'sacred'; an idea 'sacred'." The intellectual vagabonds are now also "the iconoclasts of all that is consecrated". For nothing that is consecrated can be ours or come from us and our creative nothing. Remember that, for Novatore:

"Our brain is a sparkling pyre, where the crackling fire of thought burns in joyful torments.

Our mind is a solitary oasis, always flowering and cheerful, where a secret music sings the complicated melody of our winged mystery...

our dreams are actual heavens inhabited by thrilling virgin muses."

An interesting insight here in Novatore's poetic epic of human history and society is that he sees "the fascist phenomenon" as "irrefutable proof" that "bourgeois and plebeian society" has failed and been broken. It cannot provide that which it pretends or imagines to provide for it inevitably falls into factionalism and devours itself. It is, in fact, a hotbed of factional interests that are only imaginarily bound together but which, in fact, work against each other. Such a society is then an illusion of a thing, peace and stability in a world of authoritarian capitalism, that it can never realise. Thus:

"Fascism is nothing but the convulsive and cruel pang of a plebeian society, emasculated and vulgar, that agonizes tragically, drowned in the quagmire of its flaws and of its own lies."

Such a society has no spiritual or imaginary power. Indeed, it is kept powerless. And in its agonies and lies it inevitably lashes out and tears itself apart. What is needed is new life:

"Fascism is impotent because it is brute force.

It is matter without spirit; it is night without dawn.

Fascism is the other face of socialism.

Both of them are bodies without minds."

Novatore prescribes nihilism for such a society, a nihilism which destroys all before it and builds again... in and from the abyss... "because, beyond all slavery and every dogma, we saw life dance free and naked." And so Novatore pronounces new values that would destroy old ones:

"We have killed 'duty' so that our ardent desire for free brotherhood acquires heroic valour in life.

We have killed 'pity' because we are barbarians capable of great love.

We have killed 'altruism' because we are generous egoists.

We have killed 'philanthropic solidarity' so that the social man unearths his most secret 'I' and finds the strength of the 'Unique'.

Because we know it. Life is tired of having stunted lovers.

Because the earth is tired of feeling itself trampled by long phalanxes of dwarfs chanting Christian prayers.

And finally, because we are tired of our brothers, carcasses incapable of peace and war. Too small for hatred and love."

This is the death of institutions, of society, fatherland and family. It is (and will certainly seem) a nihilistic destruction so that, and because, "the free man" is born. It is TRANSFORMATIVE:

"As the poet transforms his lyre into a dagger!

As the philosopher transforms his probe into a bomb!

As the fisherman transforms his oar into a formidable axe.

As the miner comes up from the unbearable caves of the dark mines armed with his shining iron.

As the farmer transforms his fruitful spade into a war lance.

As the labourer transforms his hammer into a scythe and cleaver.

And forward, forward, forward.

It is time, it is time—it is time!

And society will fall.

The fatherland will fall.

The family will fall.

All will fall after the Free Man is born."

One would hope that Patriarchy will also fall (those examples all being male-centric).

During 1918 and early 1919 Novatore had his issues of imprisonment and avoiding the law due to his desertion from the Italian army. These issues would eventually be resolved but he continued his writing, using false names, addressing the spirit of the age (socialist revolution after the revolution in Russia) and the place of "anarchist individualism" in relation to it. In a piece called "Anarchist Individualism in the Social Revolution" published

by *Il Libertario*. He begins this piece by laying out what “anarchist individualism” actually is:

“Anarchist individualism as we understand it—and I say we because a substantial handful of friends think this like me—is hostile to every school and every party, every churchly and dogmatic moral, as well as every more or less academic imbecility. Every form of discipline, rule, and pedantry is repulsive to the sincere nobility of our vagabond and rebellious restlessness!”

Individualism is, for us, creative force, immortal youth, exalting beauty, redemptive and fruitful war. It is the marvellous apotheosis of the flesh and the tragic epic of the spirit. Our logic is that of not having any. Our ideal is the categorical negation of all other ideals for the greatest and supreme triumph of the actual, real, instinctive, reckless, and merry life! For us perfection is not a dream, an ideal, a riddle, a mystery, a sphinx, but a vigorous and powerful, luminous and throbbing reality. All human beings are perfect in themselves. All they lack is the heroic courage of their perfection. Since the time that human beings first believed that life was a duty, a calling, a mission, it has meant shame for their power of being, and in following phantoms, they have denied themselves and distanced themselves from the real. When Christ said to human beings: ‘be yourselves, perfection is in you!’ he launched a superb phrase that is the supreme synthesis of life.”

It is not clear that Christ did say “be yourselves, perfection is in you.” As a student of the historical Jesus, my best guess would be that this is Novatore’s interpretational translation of “the kingdom of God is among (or within) you” from Luke 17, a thought which also inspired Leo Tolstoy, the Christian and pacifist anarchist, to the extent that he wrote a book called *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. This, however, would not have

been reading Novatore would have enjoyed. Novatore instead preaches the vital reality of individual life which is the only reality any of us can actually know from the inside. It is "individualism" which is here "creative force" and if it be retorted that collectives can also be creative I am sure that Novatore would reply that this is so only as the adding together of individual voices. A choir can sing – but only if individuals add their unique voices together to create it. But that might prove difficult for those who, as here, operate according to no logic and whose ideal "is the categorical negation of all other ideals" in the cause of individual life itself. This does not make choirs impossible but neither does it make them necessary either. So woe betide anyone who would then seek to mandate choirs:

"Every duty that they would like to impose on us we will furiously trample under our sacrilegious feet. Every shady phantom that they would place before our eyes, greedy for light, we will angrily rip up with our daringly profaning hands."

In the end, Novatore is not against joining in with social revolutions but he is careful not to dedicate himself to the "cause" (which would be a spook or phantom of thought). In fact, he is probably in them to use their cover for his own destructive operations:

"The revolt of the individual against society is not given by that of the masses against governments. Even when the masses submit to governments, living in the sacred and shameful peace of their resignation, the anarchist individual lives against society because he is in a never-ending and irreconcilable war with it, but when, at a historical turning point, he comes together with the masses in revolt, he raises his black flag with them and throws his dynamite with them."

The anarchist individualist is in the Social Revolution, not as a demagogue, but as an inciting element, not as an apostle, but as a living, effective, destructive force...

All past revolutions were, in the end, bourgeois and conservative. That which flashes on the red horizon of our magnificently tragic time will have for its aim the fierce socialist humanism. We, anarchist individualists, will enter into the revolution for an exclusive need of our own to set fire to and incite spirits. To make sure that, as Stirner says, it is not a new revolution that approaches, but rather an immense, proud, reckless, shameless, conscienceless crime that rumbles with the lightning on the horizon, and beneath which the sky, swollen with foreboding, grows dark and silent."

The anarchist individualist here fights for... nothing. They have no "cause". They have only themselves, an imperative of individual life and vitality like the "wild flowers" from earlier. "Anarchist individualism still means eternal revolt against eternal sorrow, the eternal search for new springs of life, joy and beauty. And we will still be such in Anarchy." "Anarchy" here is then to be equated with nihilism, with nothing, with the wild flower. And to be contrasted with "Anarchism" which is very often cast as a cause (not least by the social anarchists Novatore battled with in print) – both then and now. It is eternal revolt against all that would seek to control or constrain it as is explained in a brief letter to *Il Libertario* in which Novatore recounts his desertion:

"I too was destined to be transformed into a humble tool of bestial slavery; I too was destined to be sacrificed (O sacrificial animals...) on the altar of the stupidest, most grotesque of all human phantasms; I also was destined to be transformed into a 'piece of human material'...

But I don't believe in destiny. Nor do I believe in fatality. No! I only believe in the capacity of my power! And only in its name did I respond in a refined anarchist way, with a superb and scornful 'NO.' And I took off...

I walked with infinite joy on the paths of Sorrow. I always had danger as my companion, like a dear brother. On my lips, I always had the smile of the highest, strong beings; in my calm eyes, the fascinating vision of the heroic tragedy that only true lovers of free life understand."

The motto here is that "only through disobedience and revolt is a brilliant ray of human beauty born" and this logic (which is no logic!) is carried on in a piece called "The Expropriator" In which Novatore eulogises this figure as a prime example of the perfect anarchist. (There were numerous anarchist expropriators in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth. One might see it as an adjunct to, and land form of, piracy.) Novatore says:

"The Expropriator is the most beautiful, manly, uninhibited, virile figure that I have ever met in anarchism. He is the one who waits for nothing. He is the one who has no altar on which to sacrifice himself. He glorifies life alone with the philosophy of Action."

This description fairly bristles with the notion of DIRECT ACTION, an appropriately Stirnerite quality (although Stirner himself seems to have lacked it and so to have betrayed his own philosophy). The expropriator acts directly for themselves and does it for no cause but themselves (which is not to say merely selfishly for it could easily be a matter of a group of expropriators as, in history, it not irregularly was). But Novatore recommends it for more than this. He also does it, as he later refers to, because it

impugns civilised morality and leaves destruction in its wake! Yes, yes, Novatore is proudly nihilist! He takes things because he has the power to take them and leaves your morals and your property wounded in the process. He destroys what is for what is not. But it is not that Novatore would do this anyway. He pledges to stop on the day when there are no more phantoms and no more causes, when the idols have all been destroyed and the gods all been dismissed. Expropriation, then, is a contextual thing, an activity of the rebel who revolts and must bring all to nothing in order to make new again. Thus, we find in the piece "Toward the Hurricane" this remarkable, and remarkably descriptive, piece of rhetoric:

"We heat our pen in the volcanic fire of our negating spirit. We dip it in our vigorous heart, full of rebellious blood. And in the atheistic light of our mind, we write and write..."

So we write, quickly, without literary pursuits, without repugnant theoretical ideologies, without bigoted and sentimental mush from hysterics and political hacks, wrapped only in the cloak of our raging passions. We write only words of blood, fire, and light.

My rough, fiery, energetic pen creaks and scrapes over the white purity of this page, like a viper's tongue over the tender throat of an innocent baby, giving it death, through poison.

Away, away from me, all ideologies, theosophies, dogmatic and political philosophies; far from me, all pre-established systems: everything has fallen and burned to ashes in the corroding flame of my negating spirit.

I am the complete nihilist, the radical atheist.

I did not just now find out, I did not just now discover and come to know that the one and only most beautiful framework within which proud human Individuality stands out free, solemn, and magnificent is Nothing, the true Nothing!"

One imagines this could be a terrifying vision to the civilised human being, locked, as they are, into "civilisation" as both material reality and as ideal and imaginary. But not "the complete nihilist". They experience this only as a prison, as a barrier to truly creative and free life. To be told where to go and what to do and how to be is to have your autonomy and agency countermanded and denied. You can have the wilderness (nothing) or the tended garden (a specific, imposed something). But you cannot have both. That image will strike the civilised as a strange one for they will imagine the tended garden, with its borders, trimmed grass and hedges, and serried rows, as preferable. And thus will they give away their utter domestication and their alienation from wild, vital life. No flower looks more beautiful and more vital than that which grows where it will rather than where it is forced to grow, unnaturally, in a bed or row. Life needs no help. It simply needs to be left alone. "Civilisation" is coercion. "Civilisation" is unfree.

"May no one ever know the secret happiness that fills our solitary hearts, oh friends! Have we not stoically suffered in forced silence? No, no, may no one ever know our cruellest sorrows, nor the infinite happiness of this eternal noon. In the grotesque old world, they now believe that we are dead. And instead, we have married eternity, we—the loners!"
(From "A Life")

Novatore clearly saw himself, after the First World War, as at a pivotal moment in world history. The world had just experienced the worst war it could remember or imagine. Mile upon mile of Europe (and elsewhere) was strewn with bodies and blood. What would

humanity now become? (Even worse. But Novatore was not to experience that.) And so Novatore sees himself as offering a direction to his fellow human beings in the aftermath of the carnage, the carnival of death, brought to it by "civilisation". In "The Anarchist Temperament in the Maelstrom of History" he describes himself as anarchist "first of all, from original instinct and passionate feeling". He names himself one of those anarchists (amongst whom I would likely also number myself):

"who feel their inner self as a mighty Dionysian quiver overflowing with power, and life as heroic manifestation of force and will. They are the ones who have the instinctive and irresistible need to throw the flame of their 'I' against the walls of the outer world to demolish and live the tragedy."

Novatore sees such people, being active in their societies, as the only real alternative to "hack demagoguery and all the speculating acrobats and hypocrites of human sorrow" which we, in our time one hundred years later, still know so well. He urges them, whether communist or individualist, to action. "The true freedom and right of the human being is only in his capacity to WILL! Right and freedom are Force!" urges Novatore in a direct appeal to direct action (always a good interpretation of "might" or "power" or "force" in both Novatore and Stirner). And we should take "joy" in our direct action and in its destruction which is nourished "on wild nature". For the fact is: "The Life that society offers us is not a full, free and joyful life. It is a crushed, mutilated, humiliated life. We must refuse it." In a perhaps Romantic expression, Novatore says "In The Circle of Life" that "I feel and affirm that life cannot be at all worthy of the name if we do not live it as Artists, as Rebels, as Heroes." And so we may say that he imagines this as a meaning of his particular life under the aspect of creation. Consequently, in what is a call to the human imagination in the same essay:

"We must never stop bringing our thoughts out of our sorrow and maternally giving them that within us which is of blood, of heart, of fire, of joy, of passion, of anguish, of knowledge, of destiny, of fatality."

And so, in this essay, Novatore sings a poem to the anarchist, and nihilist, imagination:

"'Life for us is to change all that we are and all that touches us into light and flame, because we cannot do otherwise.' This is the circle—perhaps much too limited—of Life where we are perpetually knocked down without being able to escape except through the silent paths of Death! But Death does not frighten or terrorize us. On the contrary! We who proceed out of the Unknown of eternity and go toward the eternity of the Unknown have learned to look upon Death like any moment of our Life. And this is our most beautiful, our most sublime mystery! This is the final word of knowledge. The unknowable!

And it is from this our unknowable singularity that the powerful and diabolical voice of our ravenous desires rises. Desires of youthful flesh eager for pleasure, the cry of the spirit panting for unlimited freedom, mad flights of the mind through the distant, unexplored unknown; howls and ferocious blasphemies of our galloping and vagabond thought colliding with the much too mysterious walls of eternity, triumphant and Dionysian songs of a Life seen dimly through the delirium of a dream, a dream composed of a Whole lost and wandering in a Void. And in the void Death waits for us. This Death that is ours as Life is ours. This Death that we love!

But one should not be lowered into the grave with a heart swollen with sadness and weeping. It is necessary first to have lived in intensely as Artists, as Rebels, as Heroes, without ever having bathed in the bitter waters of repentance that flow in Christian rivers.

The true original and spirited sinner should not die drowning in the slimy whirlpools of a slimier remorse, but rather enveloped in the rosy blaze of the greatest sin. Before dying, we must be consumed to the last quivering spark of our luxuriant thought, having made a feast of the world and an infinite pleasure of action...

The Hero of Life goes toward Death accompanied by the tragically triumphal march of dynamite and the head encircled with flowers. Yes, anyone who has desired and been able to live as Rebel and Hero wants the freedom to burn in a beautiful blaze ignited by the greatest sin so that the prelude to death is nothing but a sweet and melancholy poem kissing a red dawn where the voice of Orpheus blends with the sobs of Prometheus and the roaring, Bacchic laughter of Dionysos resounds."

One might add to this a sentence from near the end of the piece "Spiritual Perversity" published in *Nichilismo*:

"And it is this, my conscious desperation, this my awareness of the futility of being, that makes me deeply love Life."

Novatore's vision of life is not of something controlled. It is something experienced and felt deeply, something devoid of innate meaning or foundation or cause. Life, in a sense, is exactly an abyss, nothing, simply capacity for living itself. It is that which will be destroyed and which eternity is beyond for it is set within a eternal nothingness. It, as Novatore's understanding of "Individualism", is its own end. Life has no purpose beyond itself and all else is imaginative addition, meaning out of nothing. As a consequence, in "My Iconoclastic Individualism", Novatore writes:

"I think, I know, that as long as there are men, there will be societies, since this putrid civilization with its industries and mechanical progress has already brought us to the point where it is not even possible to turn back to the enviable age of the caves and divine mates who raised and defended those born of their free and instinctive love like tawny, catlike Lionesses, inhabiting magnificent, fragrant, green and wild forests. But still I know and I think with equal certainty that every form of society—precisely because it is a society—will, for its own good, want to humiliate the individual..."

... that within me which is most incomprehensible, most mysterious and enigmatic to the collectivity is precisely my most precious treasure, my dearest good, since it is my deepest intimacy which I alone can explain and love, since I alone understand it..."

Every form of society is the product of the majority. For great Geniuses and for great lawbreakers, there is no place within the triumphant mediocrity that dominates and commands."

Society and individual are here opposed, imagined as antagonistic enemies with differing interests and priorities. For Novatore, this inspires a mission:

"My principle is life and my end is death. I want to live my life intensely so that I can embrace my death tragically. You are waiting for the revolution! Very well! My own began a long time ago! When you are ready—God, what an endless wait!—it won't nauseate me to go along the road awhile with you! But when you stop, I will continue on my mad and triumphant march toward the great and sublime conquest of Nothing!"

Every society you build will have its fringes, and on the fringes of every society, heroic and restless vagabonds will wander, with their wild and virgin thoughts, only able to live by preparing ever new and terrible outbreaks of rebellion! I shall be among them! And after me, as before me, there will always be those who tell human beings: 'So turn to yourselves rather than to your gods or idols: discover what is hidden within you, bring it to the light; reveal yourself!' Because everyone who searches his inner being and draws out what is mysteriously hidden there, is a shadow eclipsing every form of Society that exists beneath the rays of the Sun!

All societies tremble when the scornful aristocracy of Vagabonds, Unique ones, Unapproachable ones, rulers over the ideal, and Conquerors of Nothing advance without inhibitions. So, come on, Iconoclasts, forward! 'Already the foreboding sky grows dark and silent!'"

As Novatore adds in this piece: "One cannot be half a revolutionary and one cannot half think!" One must live one's life to the fullest extent of one's power. And to the end.

If such readers as Novatore had were not aware that he was a nihilist, and one proud to use the description, he writes a piece in 1920 called "I Am Also A Nihilist", published in *Nichilismo*, so that people may not be confused about it. As he describes things here, all in fact follows not from Novatore's anarchism but exactly from his nihilism:

"I am an individualist because I am an anarchist; and I am an anarchist because I am a nihilist. But I also understand nihilism in my own way..."

I don't care whether it is Nordic or Oriental, nor whether or not it has a historical, political, practical tradition, or a theoretical, philosophical, spiritual, intellectual one. I call myself a nihilist because I know that nihilism means negation.

Negation of every society, of every cult, of every rule and of every religion. But I don't yearn for Nirvana, any more than I long for Schopenhauer's desperate and powerless pessimism, which is a worse thing than the violent renunciation of life itself. Mine is an enthusiastic and Dionysian pessimism, like a flame that sets my vital exuberance ablaze, that mocks at any theoretical, scientific, or moral prison.

And if I call myself an individualist anarchist, an iconoclast, and a nihilist, it is precisely because I believe that in these adjectives there is the highest and most complete expression of my willful and reckless individuality that, like an overflowing river, wants to expand, impetuously sweeping away dikes and hedges, until it crashes into a granite boulder, shattering and breaking up in its turn. I do not renounce life. I exalt and sing it."

It turns out that nihilism is NOT the negation of life but its exaltation and extrapolation in song and poem! Life comes from nothing, is nothing, and goes back to nothing – but this is no reason to find it worthless. Rather it is a reason to engage in its performance: meaning and value come precisely from nothing: THEY ARE IMAGINED. Novatore imagines that only the life lived to the limit of both its joys and sorrows can engage it in its full reality – for life is a reality. To love life is his point and to hate it the worst possible fate of all. Life is a freedom born of nothing:

"But only the one who knows and practices the iconoclastic fury of destruction can possess the joy born of freedom, of that unique freedom fertilized by sorrow. I rise up against the reality of the outer world for the triumph of the reality of my inner world.

I reject society for the triumph of the I. I reject the stability of every rule, every custom, every morality, for the affirmation of every willful instinct, all free emotionality, every passion, and every fantasy. I mock at every duty and every right so I can sing free will."

And so:

"This is my Nihilism. Life, for me, is nothing but a heroic poem of joy and perversity written with the bleeding hands of sorrow and pain or a tragic dream of art and beauty!"

"Poem". "Dream". These are imaginary things. Novatore's nihilism is the imagination of himself brought to life, literally conjuring himself into existence and insisting that he be the only one to conjure him, conjuring himself to counteract the conjurings of others. We are, in Novatore's nihilistic vision, ourselves acts of imagination, conjurings out of nothing. But will we be ours or those of another? And what will we imagine in the void of eternity? If you would like an imaginary for this consider that once I had the dubious privilege of observing some wolves in a German zoo. They were poor creatures and I pitied them for they simply and depressingly roamed back and forward all the time on a path against one of the fences that contained them in what was obviously not natural behaviour but that was all, in their caged state, that they could really do. Wild wolves would roam far and wide across a territory and have the novelty and spontaneity of the wilderness for company - but not these wolves. They could not imagine such a life. Novatore, in his imagery of imagining, and so creating, one's own self, one's own reality, one's own world

of relations, bids us imagine life beyond the cage - and as the authors of our own lives, those bringing meaning and value from the nothingness.

But the problem is, repeated multiple times throughout Novatore's writings, that we live "In the Realm of Phantoms", the title of a piece published in *Vertice*. This is a world which proffers Novatore's twin major phantoms, that of Christ and of the French Revolution, the ideals, on the one hand, of religion and, on the other, of the citizen and the "rights of man". Both, in Novatore's eyes, are similar deceptive and evil bargains which operate, first and foremost, by asking the human being to deny themselves for some imagined greater good. Now what "greater good" could there actually be than the concrete lives of existing human beings? Why would "good" come from denying this? Why should one have to make a bargain with others in order to activate what one was born with, one's own concrete existence and the ability of self-actualisation? Yet if you do not play these games and submit to these imaginaries you are, as Novatore repeats in this essay, reduced in religious terms to the sinner and in secular terms to the criminal. Novatore responds that "So-called progress and so-called civilization, so-called religion and the so-called ideal have locked life in a deadly circle where the most baleful phantoms have built their unctuous realm. Now is the time to put an end to it!" This short piece, in fact, finishes with one of Novatore's famous rhetorical flourishes on this matter and so it is worth reproducing it here to example, once again, his mentality:

"When I look around me, I get the urge to vomit.

On one side, the scientists who I am supposed to believe so as not to be ignorant. On the other side, the moralists and philosophers, whose commandments I am supposed to accept so as not to be a brute. Then comes the Genius that I am supposed to glorify and the Hero

before whom I am to bow, moved. Then along come the comrade and the friend, the idealist and the materialist, the atheist and the believer and an infinity horde of defined and undefined apes who want to give me their good advice and finally set me on the true path. Because—of course—the path I walk is false, as my ideas, my thoughts, my entire being are false.

I am a false man. They—poor lunatics—are all obsessed with the idea that life has called them to be priests officiating at the altar of the greatest missions, since humanity is called to the greatest destinies... These poor, pathetic beasts, scarred by sham ideals and transfigured by madness, could never understand the tragic and merry wonder of life, as they could never see that humanity is not really called to any great destiny. If they had understood any of this at all, they would have at least learned that their so-called likes actually have no desire to break their backs bridging the chasm that separates one from the other.

BUT I AM WHAT I AM, IT DOESN'T MATTER.

And the cawing of these multi-coloured magpies only serves to brighten up my personal and noble wisdom. Oh, apostolic apes of humanity and social progress, don't you hear something thundering above your phantoms?

Listen, listen! It is the piercing roar of my wild laughter that is rumbling overhead, in the heights!"

What Novatore is pointing out, of course, and what the masses cannot see, is that their spooks and phantoms are imaginary and being possessed by them is voluntary. We have

no genuine duty to Christ. We have no genuine duty to the State or its government. We have no duty to a wholly fictive "Humanity" or an artificial and arbitrary "Family". These things do not exist in a state of sanctity and sacredness. They are things we can choose to imagine and believe – and only imagine and believe. We can kill people for them if we like – but only we will have made us do so if we do. Novatore's is an ethic of radical self-responsibility and even of self-responsibility as the only ethic. Do as you will – but do it knowing the responsibility can only ever be yours. Revel in the autonomy of that responsibility – for that is Life! You must enter "The Revolt of the Unique" as Novatore lays out in a polemical argument against one Carlo Molaschi in a major essay by that name published in *Pagina Libertaria* in 1921 after Molaschi had stopped being an egoist and individualist anarchist, as Novatore was, and become a social and communist one, trashing his former beliefs and positions in the process. In this essay, Novatore feels the need to polemically restate the position on his side of this fence whilst having a few digs at Molaschi's change of heart as well.

It is interesting, then, that the place Novatore begins this polemic is with confession:

"I don't want to dictate moral maxims to my 'neighbour,' or teach anyone anything... I leave this task to the missionaries of all faiths, the priests of all churches, the demagogues of all parties, the apostles of all ideas. I only want to howl my extreme rebellion against everything that oppresses me; I only want to push far away from me everything that the religious, socialist, or libertarian priesthood wants to impose on my individuality without me having freely accepted and wanted it."

What appears, to Novatore, to mark him and his kind out is that they are not a priesthood inculcating a faith. They are, quite literally, for themselves. They are not in the business of

micro-managing the lives of others – and they want to keep far away from all those who would micro-manage. They have no interest in “The dogmatic frogs of societarianism and the geese of the ideal”. His point in this seems reasonable: “I have a personal truth of my own that isn’t and can’t be universal ‘truth’.” He explains this reasonably too: “I am guided by an instinct, by a feeling, by a dream, that are only the trilogy composing the unique ideal that is my individuality. Individuality that nobody except me and my power can make strong, free, and happy!” Novatore continues that he allows others their freedom of thought. He should be allowed his. Consequently:

“Let each human being therefore work—if he thinks this way—at the discovery of his own I, at the realization of his own dream, at the complete integration and full development of his own individuality. Every human being who has discovered and won himself walks on his own path and follows his free course.

But let no one come to me to impose his belief, his will, his faith on me. By denying god, fatherland, authority, and law, I have achieved anarchism. By refusing to sacrifice myself on the altar of the people and of humanity, I have achieved individualism. Now I am free...

The war that I opened against phantoms has ended with my victory. Now the cycle of a new war has opened! The war against the brute force of society, of the people, of humanity. Against these terrible and colossal monsters that aren’t ashamed to dare to act against the unique and the brutal force of their thousand monstrous arms, I ‘authorize’ myself to defend myself with all the weapons that it is possible for me to dare to use: with all those means that I have the power and the ability to make use of. Without scruples! Because I am one who really follows himself!”

There is a basic antagonism here: must I be forced to believe and act as others do regardless of my own feelings, intuitions and beliefs on the matter? Is society just a prison for the coercion of its forced members? Novatore insists not – but imagines that others appear to think it is. Later on, disputing with his rhetorical Molaschi, he says that “the dream of workers is not my dream. The longings of the people are not my longings, the pains of the mass are not my pains!..” And we may ask: should they be? Are they forced to be? Are human beings to be imagined dysfunctional robots in need of reprogramming if they go off-script or self-governing intelligences and imaginations with freedom of thought? Novatore’s argument is a variation of “Everybody’s different – and they should be allowed to be!” within an understanding which regards systematic coercion of others (not least those who imagine themselves on the side of the angels) as both a sin and a crime, something to violently refuse. Consequently, his beef with more “social” or “communist” forms of anarchism, with “conferences... unions... workerism... organisations”, etc., is that “anarchism has ended up making itself official and becoming a party”, to him an apparent contradiction in terms. This is not the anarchism of someone like the Frenchman Zo d’Axa, an individualist like Novatore, who had once written in his anarchist newspaper: “Neither in a party nor a group. Outside” (in a newspaper, in fact, which was called exactly “The Outside”). D’Axa had positioned himself and his kind, as Novatore does too, on the margins of society ON PURPOSE. This was an indication both that “we are not the same” and that “we will not think or act the same”. Molaschi appears to accuse Novatore of being “anti-society” as a result and it is clear enough that, in some senses, he is. But he himself wants to be clear about in what sense this is:

“... we need to come to a bit of an agreement about what ‘anti-society’ means. I am not a misanthrope and so much the less a misogynist... I need friends and lovers, clothes and bread. I am not an anchorite or a saint in the desert. But there’s no need to be such a thing

in order to be anti-society. Being anti-society means—for me—not collaborating in the preservation of the present society nor lending one's efforts to any new social construction. I said it once before:

'Every society you build will have its fringes, and on the fringes of every society, heroic and restless vagabonds will wander, with their wild and virgin thoughts, only able to live by preparing ever new and terrible outbreaks of rebellion! I shall be among them!'

And if materialistic 'needs' force me to go toward society, the 'necessity' to be free sets me against it and gives birth in me to a third 'need.' That of doing violence to it. Without scruples!

This is my 'anti-society' perspective. And if we happened to speak of so-called 'progress' I could even affirm—without fear of going wrong—that the triumph and the glory of the human path are due only to the spirit that informs this anti-society principle of individualism."

Novatore tries to mix logic and reasoned argument in with this position, seemingly trying to make a convincing argument that he is not simply a random madman who is raving. He points out, for example, that "Freedom", taken as an idea in itself, is simply "negation" (or, perhaps, "nihilism"?). Freedom, in the simple sense, is freedom from things, the destruction or negation of things which constrict or constrain you. One does not have "freedom" unless the impediments to it have been destroyed or rendered wholly ineffective. Freedom is the death of opposing powers. Novatore adds then that "Freedom is a propulsion towards power—it is the strength of conquest and the capacity for possession." Freedom then becomes my ability to engage in my own direct action and,

indeed, may even be equated with *my capacity for direct action: inasmuch as I can act directly for myself, I am free.*

This, of course, raises the prospect that life, in more general terms, is constantly about this back and forth of power (as Foucault imagined) and our ability to act for ourselves in a world in which others have the same power. But what can be done about that? “Living means doing good and bad to others.” That is simply “a fact of life”. But what need not be a fact of life is the systematic coercion of one life by another. Neither rulers nor tyrants need be the case. Neither law nor property need be the case. That we all be “levelled” (be made part of a forced equality rather than an equality achieved by letting it naturally arise as some philosophies, such as Daoism, imagine) need not be the case. Some fight for this, thinking it good, and some fight against it, as they feel they must. Novatore was one of the latter. But then again:

“I don’t announce or promise anything. There are too many lying prophets who announce the possibility of a new life; and even more vulgar plebeians of the spirit who promise the world—new Jesuses—with their unredeemed blood...”

Who am I? I don’t know! I can’t describe myself!...

I know I am a mixture of modesty and pride, wisdom and ignorance, vice and virtue, cowardice and heroism, light and gloom, logic and absurdity. I am suspended above the abyss of unexplored depth with my eyes fixed on a distant peak that may be nothing more than an illusion. I know there are within me sunlit and blossoming summits like fantastic summer gardens, and dark hidden caverns that will never see the light of day. I have found FRIENDS who are a bit like me because I am a bit like them, and we have agreed to build a

crystalline house together on the rocks of a PEAK. We don't for this reason believe ourselves gods. But there are eagles and snakes who, like gods, love the virgin heights... and we are among them.

Therefore, we are animals, but animals of the peaks! Animals crouched in strange postures among the symbolic shrubs of truly free art, we will cultivate poisonous flowers of pure beauty even though the apes who live in the low social swamps hurl their powerless anathema and their hoarse, ridiculous curses toward our nest of violent loners.

I've finished my declaration, but I haven't described myself. I know that anyone, even the most humble of mortals, has the right to make a declaration of this sort. But I also know that aside from having the right to it, the most brilliant genius must see it as an absolute DUTY." ("A Portrayal of Sorts" in *Vertice*, April 1921)

But in "Beyond the Two Anarchies", also published in *Vertice* in the same month, Novatore can add:

"I—anarchist and individualist—don't want to, and cannot, embrace the cause of atheist communism because I don't believe in the supreme elevation of the masses and therefore I refuse the realization of Anarchy understood as a social form of human life together. Anarchy is in free spirits, in the instinct of great rebels, and in great and superior minds. Anarchy is the innermost animating mystery of misunderstood uniquenesses, strong because alone, noble because they have the courage of solitude and of love, aristocratic because scornful of commonness, heroic because against all...

Anarchy is nectar for the psychic I and not sociological alcohol for the collectivity. The anarchist is the one who refuses every cause for the joy of his life radiating from inner spiritual intensity. No future and no humanity, no communism and no anarchy, is worthy of the sacrifice of my life. From the day that I discovered myself, I have considered myself as the supreme PURPOSE...

I—crazed human eagle—flash across the gloomy darkness of this black night, where the storm of ideas howls and the winds of thought roar, to later soar beyond the arms of the earliest glimmer of the dawn, among the raging flames of the noontime sun, sensing myself in the voluptuous and Dionysian throbbing of the vital, amoralistic instinct where the light of the spirit and the passion of emotion get drunk in the wild and virgin springs of blood and flesh...

In life I seek the joy of the spirit and the luxurious voluptuousness of instinct. And I don't care to know whether these have their perverse roots in the caverns of good or in the whirling abysses of evil. I rise, and if in rising I encounter the tragic lightning of my destiny, life and death will bend on my twisted lips to later follow me into the supreme turmoil where Art glorifies the strong, misunderstood rebels who morality reviles and condemns, who science calls lunatics, and who society curses."

Here we have an ode to one of two ways of Anarchy, one which sees it as "a social form of human life together", a compulsion to imposed Utopia, the arbitrary organising of Paradise, and another which sees the sociability in that idea as consequential upon something else, something more important and more necessary and which one can only fashion for oneself from the abyss of nothingness – the free spirit, the "true nihilists of reality and the spiritual builders of ideal worlds" who are "destructive philosophers and

creative poets” as Novatore puts it in his piece “Black Flags” from the summer 1922, only a few months before his death. Here it is that he writes “You must seek your own enemy, fight your own war, and for your own ideas.” But that, of course, requires you to engage in having “your own ideas” to begin with – which is what this chapter I have been writing, and this story I have been telling, has been about. It is about engaging in what Novatore calls in “Black Flags” “the heroic transfiguration of the spirit” out of the nothing from which we have all come and knowing, full well, that the only consequence of our lives will be that we, and everything else that is, is going straight back to it. And so:

“We are rebel poets and philosophers of destruction.

We are anarchists.

Iconoclasts!

Individualists,

atheists,

nihilists!

We are the carriers of black flags...

We rush beyond every system

We rush beyond every form

We fly toward the highest freedom

Toward extreme ANARCHY!...

We have killed the “duty” of solidarity, so that our free lust for spontaneous love and voluntary parenthood acquires a heroic value in life...

We need an epic and barbaric song of new and virgin life sounding over the world.

*We are the carriers of blazing torches.
We are the kindlers of crackling pyres.
Our flag is black.
Our road is the infinite.
And our highest ideal is the peak and the abyss.
We walk on!...*

*We walk on...
And if our dream is an illusion?
And if our struggles are useless and vain? And if the renewal of humanity is impossible to
accomplish?
Ah, no! We will walk on just the same.
For our own dignity.
For the love of our ideas.
For the freedom of our spirits.
For the passion of our minds.
For the necessity of our life.
Better to die as heroes in an effort of liberation and self-elevation than to vegetate as
impotent cowards in this repugnant reality.*

*Oh black flags,
oh black trophies,
emblems and symbols
of eternal revolt."*

8. POSTSCRIPT

At the end of my own book called *Black Flag*, an exploration of, and exhortation to, an anarchy of social egoistic piracy, I finished by fashioning the following seven “Articles of Jolly Roger’s Anarchy” as articles of association within it. They were:

- i. Hold nothing sacred and, in so doing, destroy all authority.
- ii. Agency, autonomy and free association are the lived basis of authentic social life.
- iii. “Self-organisation” is our principle of life and anarchy described.
- iv. If something is not voluntary then it should not be done.
- v. Creating relationships which help others is also helping yourselves.
- vi. To get out of the prison, think yourself out of it – and then act accordingly.
- vii. Everything is a fiction.

These are self-evidently my own articles, products of my own imagination that I hope would be backed up by the substance of what I have written in the body of that book they conclude but also all else I have written about anarchy since. They are not, then, me cribbing other people’s notes and simply saying either what they think or what I imagine is “the right thing to say”. These are my own ideas put in my own words and on my own terms as part of an imaginary of an anarchist pirate fraternity, a voluntary form of imagined anarchist human relationship. Being someone never to rest on their laurels, I have habitually questioned these articles since I first wrote them, fairly spontaneously in the first place, and so have asked myself whether they should be changed, altered or even removed. But I could, up until now, find no definitive reason to do any of those things. So far.

But that was before I began working on this book – and especially on this chapter about IMAGINATION, the power to conjure from nothing, the power to create, and to enchant. Now I see reason to re-write some of the articles, to lose one, and to add an eighth and ninth article. So, in the light of this change of mind, my renewed vision and my extended imaginary of the consequent anarchist pirate fraternity, the updated articles now read as follows:

Articles of Jolly Roger's Anarchy

- i. Hold nothing sacred and, in so doing, destroy all authority.
- ii. Agency, autonomy and free association are the lived basis of authentic social life.
- iii. Self-organisation, self-actualisation and self-responsibility are the principles of life and anarchist life described.
- iv. If something is not voluntary then it should not be done.
- v. At all times and in all places act as if you are free rather than a slave.
- vi. Everything is a fiction.
- vii. The human imagination is the best tool you have. And the most necessary weapon. Use it.
- viii. Anarchy is alchemy - it is a matter of transforming things.
- ix. Anarchy is a social egoism, a freedom born of relationships and desire.



Now whilst these nine articles function for me as the imaginary articles of an anarchist pirate fraternity, it should also be pretty clear to readers that they also function as an insurrectionary nihilist anarchist ethos. They, when discussed, filled out, related and inter-related, analysed and synthesised, become “a way of being in the world”. What “way of being” is this? Allow me some “first thoughts” to finish both this chapter and this section of my book.

It is one consciously imagined, one conjured – and one conjured in the face of the world, something that should be obvious from the “pirate” analogy (and not merely analogy) I have utilised in characterising anarchy. Pirates were (and still are) who they were in the face of the world, in open, conscious defiance of the people the world required them to be. If the basis for our imagined anarchy, following Stirner and Novatore, is that NOTHING IS SACRED, then that can only be because we want to make not just particular examples of authority henceforth ineffective and defunct but because we want to destroy the very idea of “authority” and make it an idea which ceases to exist. For this we then need an imaginary in which nothing is sacred. And so, from the very start of these articles, we see the imagination is vital to the manifestation and performance of our anarchy. You cannot become what you cannot imagine. Becoming is an act of imagination.

The second article is then an imaginary of both people and their relationships described in the trilogy agency-autonomy-free association. This article is imagining a certain kind of people who are related in a particular kind of way. This attempts to introduce a certain kind of organisation in human to human dealings (free association – relationships at the behest and common agreement of those involved in them) but without the needs of relationship ever trespassing on the needs for individual space (agency and autonomy). This comes from a place in which neither individual freedom nor human relationship are

good enough by themselves. The imaginary here is that one must inform and interact with, and so transform, the other if it is to lead to healthier results. Think of it by analogy to cooking: the meal relies on quality ingredients judiciously mixed together. What you are using is important to the outcome but so is how they are related to each other.

The third article began in reflections I had about life as a thing in itself. What is life? (This is a surprisingly hard question to answer, one which even decorated scientists seem not to have an entirely final answer for.) Many would plump for things like “growth” or “development” here, defining life by signs of its apparent movement. My own answer, originally simply “self-organisation”, is not so far away from this. In the update of the articles here, in light of my chapter, I have added “self-actualisation” and “self-responsibility” too. I see these really as aspects of the original self-organisation, but aspects which serve a purpose in being highlighted themselves. The living organism, it seems to me (and the idea here is to be as general, basic and simply biological as possible, to formulate a description which can apply to “life” in the round), must be that which has some ability to organise and direct itself, develop itself in needful or desired directions and take responsibility for what it is and becomes. Inasmuch as I am then equating “anarchy” with a state of nature or reality – and so life itself as a product of this – I am then imagining this as both an anarchistic description of life as well as an anarchistic prescription for life.

A fundamental self-understanding of anarchists since at least Pierre-Joseph Proudhon has been that they are non-coercive people. This, for better or worse, is an ethical stance they have taken. For me, this issues in the promotion of voluntarism and so my fourth article, one singularly focused on human relations. It is here an echo of, and building upon, the second and third articles. It imagines autonomous, self-directed people operating

relationally, and in community, on the basis of an open voluntarism. This will be a place both where people take the initiative but also where no one assumes. It will also be a place devoid of moral obligation or manipulative expectation. In the fraternity imagined here, no one can obligate you but you yourself.

The consequence of this, if not also its founding imaginary, is that you conceive of yourself as fundamentally, cosmically free – and never as a slave. This article again finds value in the context of the chapter about imagination which comes before it for it recognises that HOW we think of ourselves, how we contextualise that with connections, associations and relationships and what content we give it, is very, very important. This builds on all the rhetorics of both Stirner and Novatore – which you can see in their writing raises them in height, puffs out their chests, and brings them to “egoistic” existence. But we can also put this another way: if you act like a doormat people will treat you like a doormat. These articles, however, recognise, and encourage, the value in everyone. You are not a slave. You are free! So believe and act as if you are! (Please note that this article was a re-writing of the previously present article about “getting out of the prison”. The first step in getting out of any prison is imagining yourself outside it. Only then can you act to achieve it.)

Articles vi, vii and viii in my new configuration are really associated articles directly responding to the impetuses of the chapter on imagination that they find themselves in – and that even though one of them – everything is a fiction – was always there from the beginning. It would seem that there has always been some kind of background acknowledgement, throughout my adult life, that at least thought was playing a role in human life and relationships. But this was never openly examined in my life before the research for this chapter was engaged in this context of anarchy and nothingness. This

revealed that only not was everything a fiction, but that nothing was perceived or experienced that was not organised by imagination – and even that the imagination is a force of alchemical power. I am saying that you can literally change reality in and by how you imagine it. Parable, history, books and films, and rhetoric, are just some of the examples I openly discussed above which demonstrated this. Obviously, in a political context of anarchy, this is vitally important not only to recognise but also to become familiar with and so to activate. We must exercise our imaginations and put them to work as weapons for ourselves. Because you better believe your enemies are. Historically, as example, this is why pirates had the Jolly Roger. It was a flag (i.e. a magical symbol packed with meaning) determined to terrify all those who spotted it coming over the horizon or around the cape. What can be imagined can transform the world and how we perceive it. This is the entire basis of language, art, imagination and consciousness in Alan Moore's conception of "magic" (which they together constitute, "magic" being the "purposeful engagement with the possibilities and phenomena of consciousness" in Alan and Steve Moore's *Moon and Serpent Bumper Book of Magic*).

In this respect, my original and still retained article "everything is a fiction" simply means that everything has been imagined or "written". And it can be again. We should use that to our advantage and, if we are smart, we will. Indeed, as my eighth article points out, anarchy can be perceived of as nothing other than engaging in the transformation of things, the universe itself being a process of constant, and consistent, transformation.

An example of this transformation is my ninth and final article which imagines anarchy as "social egoism". This linguistic description is partly inspired by my desire to get past the sterile social/individual opposition which, as I imagine these two things in relation, is not an "opposition" at all. Social worlds require individuals just as individuals require social

worlds. To make them an “opposition” is stupid and self-defeating. So why not combine them instead? Of course, we do this in the light of all my other articles here. We remember the importance of agency and autonomy and its relation to free association. But, as we do that, we can begin to imagine anarchy, politically and cosmically conceived, as the space where social and personal freedoms merge into one and become indistinguishable. Anarchy must be the imaginary space where individuals are free and uncoerced – but it must also be the imaginary space where communities and relationships are too, where social and political worlds are too, where domination, coercion and exploitation are impossible and unthinkable. I call that a place of social egoism.

(This chapter was completed on November 29th, 2024, on the 102nd anniversary of Renzo Novatore’s death at the hands of a police gunman in the service of Benito Mussolini’s fascist state. It is dedicated to Renzo’s memory and to his prodigious example of anarchist and nihilist imagination.)

“I can no longer dream, I am the dream of myself.” (Renzo Novatore)



The Imaginative Task

Since writing the last chapter, where I was talking, amongst other things, about imagination and imagining my own socio-political space as a consequence, to now, here, and the next chapter in my book, which discusses the imagination of *alchemical anarchy* and goes quite thoroughly into several of the ramifications of that, I have been doing some thinking. And I have come to some further conclusions. This thinking has been in the form of further consequences of what I was saying previously in “I Want To Tell You A Story”. So what follows will carry on from the ideas presented there and develop upon them further and in possibly surprisingly transformative ways.

You will recall that in that last chapter I had a section about history where I laid out three points:

1. History is fiction(s).
2. In the matter of “history” there is no “original” to correspond to or “re-present”.
3. History is imagined or “conjured” (and so can be reimagined or re-conjured).

But in further thinking about this the question arises in my mind “Is it something about history specifically that leads to these points or something about *us* and *our relation* to it, to what is an imagined “outside of us” (as Fish raises in his rhetoric about rhetoric in the fifth part of that chapter)? And I conclude its the latter and not the former. But if that is true (true = “useful to believe”) then its not just something about our relationship to history but to everything in that “interpreted outside” that we are talking about. In fact, we seem to be saying that simply in our daily experience, as a means of our normal and regularised operation as human beings, we are “imagining an outside”, creating a reality

in which to live and act and interact. Said reality is then built out in our imagination, is imagined in the full sense of that term, until we have what we call a world to live in. (For reasons Richard Rorty makes clear in multiple essays, most of our beliefs about this world *have* to be “true”.)

Now I do not perceive of this as a “non-realist” thesis for, along with Rorty, I am still happy to say that I imagine a physical world beyond us that, as Rorty seems to put it, “can cause us to hold beliefs”. Its just that (as Alan Moore contends along with Rorty) we also have imaginations “which can cause us to hold beliefs” – and which, as I am imagining it now turns out, are exactly “causing us to hold beliefs” ALL THE TIME as a matter of our normal operation. “Imagination” is how we “make sense” (“make sense” = “make useful”) of/to ourselves as beings in an imagined environment, how we engage and interact with that environment. We are, in a magical vocabulary inspired by Moore, “conjuring an environment” at all times (using our senses and reason as data collectors/creators, no doubt); we are never doing anything other than imagining, conjuring the “sense” or “reality” we then imagine to inhabit which previously I have called “fictality” (fiction + reality = fictality).

Again, this does not mean “nothing is real”. I consent to the notion of a physical realm and an imaginary realm (both existing as interpreted or imagined beyonds to and for ourselves) in which we can live and move and which can cause us to hold beliefs about them. I am not saying, in a solipsistic imaginary some would probably like to accuse me of, that we are all that exists and we imagine the rest. I am saying that we navigate our existences by imagining our way through all our experiences of these “interpreted outsides”, by fabricating or conjuring their circumstances, fitting them together according to what we can imagine of them. Human life, in this sense, might well be adequately

described as “magical” whether we are there talking about art or science or language or consciousness as a means to this. (I take this to be consonant with what Alan and Steve Moore are saying in their *Moon and Serpent Bumper Book of Magic*. Referring to the cave painting known as “The Dancing Sorcerer”, they begin their “Old Moores’ Lives of the Great Enchanters” in that book by arguing that “The Sorcerer’s dance is one between mankind and its imagination, *by which the entire universe is brought cascading into being*” [emphasis mine].)

What follows? One corollary, it seems to me, is to confirm that “reality does not speak for itself” – and that is a huge corollary. This is not least because, if we call reality “anarchy” (according to a naturalistic principle), then we are confirming that there is no doctrine, dogma or script of anarchy. “Reality is not a boss”: it cannot be named, tagged, definitively described, put in a box or ascribed a role. We are saying that both reality and anarchy “become” as they can, and as they will, inscrutably (but not unimaginably). (If we were thinking about this by analogy to the Dao or Way of Daoism, which might be a useful imaginary and so one we might need to come back to, we would remind ourselves, once again, that what happens, happens and that all we are doing is imagining to make it useful for ourselves in a way that doesn’t destroy everything else, eventually including ourselves, in so doing. The point is then to live at peace and to at least attempt to live in balance with other, similarly existing, things which you do not control for they are part of an outside or beyond you.) Of course, that “reality does not speak for itself” would also seem to mandate that we consequently have to imagine it and that we are not in a “corresponding” or “re-presenting” kind of situation in which reality is an authority. So be it.

Politically speaking, this opens up the field. There is no “way the world is”. There is no “way the world *should* be”. There are no mandated utopias, only imagined ones. There are only “ways the world can be imagined” where these are “ways the world can be imagined to be made useful”. But useful to who? And what for? Might not these ways clash – not just with the imaginaries of others but even with other parts of reality or its ways of existing? Precisely. We have, as I tried to suggest in “I Want To Tell You a Story”, rhetoricised EVERYTHING. Its all imagination and we are imagining our way through life as if navigating through dreams (perhaps, as those both ancient and modern have sometimes suggested, the dreams of a sentient universe or Edgar Allen Poe’s “dream within a dream”). Nietzsche says in his *Nachlass* that “what we do when dreaming we also do when we are awake”: I now understand more what he meant by that and it is pretty much made into a slogan when he similarly writes in his notebooks that “facts is what there is not, only interpretations”.

What does this mean for anarchy? It means there is no “cause” (or it means there are only imagined causes – which is to say the same thing). As a consequence, Stirner saw pursuing causes (or phantoms like God and State, its secular, earthly analogue) as tying yourself to dogmas, an inauthentic task which denies the unique and its property (i.e. you and me as material-imaginary singularities). He gives the key insight which egoist and nihilist anarchists alike, it seems to me, take to heart. (This is not formally opposed to the social anarchist starting point which is a political-economic analysis of society and a yearning for freedom and equality in these areas. Yet only if not as “a cause”.) This is that we start, always, constantly, repeatedly, from ourselves and where we are. Stirner gives the insight which proclaims anarchy *without a cause*. (And this means you don’t turn yourself into a cause either.) Anarchy, in this imaginary, is self-organising, self-responsible, self-actualising things self-organising, self-actualising and being self-responsible for

themselves. Life, if socially implicated and created, is individually activated. It's a both/and situation, an activity of singularities and relationships (rather than socially imposed and imagined collectives forced into relationship imaginarily). In this imaginary you have to let people be the "imaginary singularities in relationship" (actual or potential) it imagines them to be and let them find their way, by means of their imagining apparatus, to lives through imagining autonomies, agencies and associations which can build imaginary and material worlds. It is a non or anti-authoritarian vision of human beings, of their relationships and of the reality they imagine to inhabit. I did say earlier that the opposite of nihilism is authoritarianism. Here is that thought reworked and re-presented philosophically, politically and relationally.

But, in the process of doing this, haven't I made the world, and our lives, meaningless? Aren't I saying that "Nothing really matters cos it's all just imagination?" Aren't all the values and meanings just "made up"? Yes, like anything and everything linguistic, artistic, imagined or conscious, they are "just made up":

But why should that be inconsequential?

Is what people IMAGINE, is *anything* IMAGINARY, inconsequential? Alan Moore tells us that the idea of the God IS THE GOD. He tells us that the idea of the God IS REAL (if imaginary, "imaginary" being a particular kind of real rather than a particular kind of unreal). It seems to me that, if we are going to take that reasoning seriously (and I think Alan Moore has a point because what we imagine clearly has all sorts of consequences), then our thoughts and feelings and emotional responses MATTER. As long as we have thoughts and feelings about meanings and values, as long as our bodies and actions respond to them, then they are going to have consequences for thoughts and feelings are

things we respond to and act on the basis of. We might arrange our lives in such a way as to encourage or promote certain thoughts and feelings and to make certain other thoughts and feelings less likely, for example. A world where thoughts and feelings matter will continue to be a world where directions of travel, types of lives and their circumstances and relationships to people and things matter. Things being “imagination” makes no difference to any of that any more than wearing a VR headset would. If you live, act and react “as if” something were of consequence then in that moment IT IS OF CONSEQUENCE and it being “of consequence” is what matters.

In fact, isn't life simply “playing with the consequences”? On the imaginary, vision, dream or enchantment I am putting forward, imagination is the most important and consequential thing about us, equatable both *with* our consciousness and *to* the conception of a magical universe that we regard as existence itself in terms of our being implicated in it as the things we imagine ourselves to be within it (a matter of relationships). Our lives, looked at this way, are a combination of consciousness, imagination and magic plus the relationships we find ourselves entangled in. Both are imagined consequential (matters about which we should rightly have views or form opinions and attitudes) in addition. To be imaginary beings who are products of imagination also seems to necessitate that we imagine the consequences of what we imagine too (immaterially AND materially). Imagination is enhanced (as a tool useful to the beings that we are) by being consequential in such ways and by us taking up imagined positions in relation to consequences. Let us see where this takes us.

A) Anarchy Without A Cause

So here we are, with our imaginations and our relations, in the environment of “anarchy without a cause”. What shall we imagine?

First of all, we shall imagine an anarchy, an anarchy exactly without a cause, a nihilist anarchy. Anarchy begins (all beginnings are, of course, interpretive and artificial; I am sympathetic, for example, with the case which has anarchy beginning with Daoist and Cynic personalities and their pronouncements) with the twin pillars of William Godwin’s philosophical minarchism and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s post-Fourier denunciations of property, capital and government and his approval of things like contract relations, self-organisation and the federation of self-organising units of society. Godwin, for example, in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) tells us that:

“I have deeply reflected,’ suppose, ‘upon the nature of virtue, and am convinced that a certain proceeding is incumbent on me. But the hangman, supported by an act of parliament, assures me I am mistaken.’ If I yield my opinion to his dictum, my action becomes modified, and my character also. An influence like this is inconsistent with all generous magnanimity of spirit, all ardent impartiality in the discovery of truth, and all inflexible perseverance in its assertion. Countries, exposed to the perpetual interference of decrees, instead of arguments, exhibit within their boundaries the mere phantoms of men. We can never judge from an observation of their inhabitants what men would be if they knew of no appeal from the tribunal of conscience, and if, whatever they thought, they dared to speak, and dared to act...”

Meanwhile, Proudhon writes in *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* (1851) that:

"Rousseau teaches in unmistakable terms, that in a government really democratic and free the citizen, in obeying the law, obeys only his own will. But the law has been made without my participation, despite my absolute disapproval, despite the injury which it inflicts upon me. The State does not bargain with me: it gives me nothing in exchange: it simply practices extortion upon me. Where then is the bond of conscience, reason, passion or interest which binds me?"

But what do I say? Laws for one who thinks for himself, and who ought to answer only for his own actions; laws for one who wants to be free, and feels himself worthy of liberty? I am ready to bargain, but I want no laws. I recognize none of them: I protest against every order which it may please some power, from pretended necessity, to impose upon my free will. Laws! We know what they are, and what they are worth! Spider webs for the rich and powerful, steel chains for the weak and poor, fishing nets in the hands of the Government. . .

With suffrage, or the universal vote, it is evident that the law is neither direct nor personal, anymore than collective. The law of the majority is not my law, it is the law of force; hence the government based upon it is not my government; it is government by force.

That I may remain free; that I may not have to submit to any law but my own, and that I may govern myself, the authority of the suffrage must be renounced: we must give up the vote, as well as representation and monarchy. In a word, everything in the government of

society which rests on the divine must be suppressed, and the whole rebuilt upon the human idea of CONTRACT . . ."

But let us not base everything only Godwin and Proudhon – who both critique the State and argue that force (which is all the State really is) is not freedom. Add in also Stirner, Bellegarrigue and Déjacque:

"The fight of the world today is, as it is said, directed against the 'established.' Yet people are wont to misunderstand this as if it were only that what is now established was to be exchanged for another, a better, established system. But war might rather be declared against establishment itself, the State, not a particular State, not any such thing as the mere condition of the State at the time; it is not another State (e.g., a 'people's State') that men aim at, but their union, uniting, this ever-fluid uniting of everything standing. - A State exists even without my co-operation: I am born in it, brought up in it, under obligations to it, and must 'do it homage.' It takes me up into its 'favour,' and I live by its 'grace.' Thus the independent establishment of the State founds my lack of independence; its condition as a 'natural growth,' its organism, demands that my nature not grow freely, but be cut to fit it. That it may be able to unfold in natural growth, it applies to me the shears of 'civilization'; it gives me an education and culture adapted to it, not to me, and teaches me, e.g., to respect the laws, to refrain from injury to State property (i.e., private property), to reverence divine and earthly highness, etc.; in short, it teaches me to be - unpunishable, 'sacrificing' my ownness to 'sacredness' (everything possible is sacred; e.g., property, others' lives, etc.). In this consists the sort of civilization and culture that the State is able to give me: it brings me up to be a 'serviceable instrument,' a 'serviceable member of society.'

. . . The State always has the sole purpose to limit, tame, subordinate, the individual – to make him subject to some generality or other; it lasts only so long as the individual is not all in all, and it is only the clearly marked restriction of me, my limitation, my slavery. Never does a State aim to bring in the free activity of individuals, but always that which is bound to the purpose of the State. Through the State nothing in common comes to pass either, as little as one can call a piece of cloth the common work of all the individual parts of a machine; it is rather the work of the whole machine as a unit, machine work. In the same style everything is done by the State machine too; for it moves the clockwork of the individual minds, none of which follow their own impulse. The State seeks to hinder every free activity by its censorship, its supervision, its police, and holds this hindering to be its duty, because it is in truth a duty of self-preservation. The State wants to make something out of man, therefore there live in it only made men; every one who wants to be his own self is its opponent and is nothing. 'He is nothing' means as much as, the State does not make use of him, grants him no position, no office, no trade, etc.

*... The best State will clearly be that which has the most loyal citizens, and the more the devoted mind for legality is lost, so much the more will the State, this system of morality, this moral life itself, be diminished in force and quality. With the 'good citizens' the good State too perishes and dissolves into anarchy and lawlessness. 'Respect for the law!' By this cement the totality of the State is held together. 'The law is sacred, and he who affronts it a criminal.' Without crime, no State: the moral world - which the State is - is crammed full of scamps, cheats, liars, thieves, etc. Since the State is the 'lordship of law,' its hierarchy, it follows that the egoist, in all cases where his advantage runs against the State's, can satisfy himself only by crime . . ." (Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, 1844)*

"Who says anarchy, says negation of government;

Who says negation of government says affirmation of the people;

Who says affirmation of the people, says individual liberty;

Who says individual liberty, says sovereignty of each;

Who says sovereignty of each, says equality;

Who says equality, says solidarity or fraternity;

Who says fraternity, says social order.

By contrast:

Who says government, says negation of the people;

Who says negation of the people, says affirmation of political authority;

Who says affirmation of political authority, says individual dependency;

Who says individual dependency, says class supremacy;

Who says class supremacy, says inequality;

Who says inequality, says antagonism;

Who says antagonism, says civil war;

From which it follows that who says government, says civil war.

Yes, anarchy is order, whereas government is civil war." (Anselme Bellegarrigue, "Anarchy is Order", 1850)

"Of Revolution

Principles: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

Consequences: Abolition of government in all its guises, be they monarchist or republican, the supremacy of an individual or of a majority; Rather, anarchy, individual sovereignty, complete, boundless, utter freedom to do anything and everything that is in human nature.

Abolition of Religion, be it Catholic or Jewish, Protestant or other. Abolition of clergy and altar, of priest - be he curate or pope, minister or rabbi - of Divinity, be it an idol with one person or with three, autocracy or universal oligarchy; Rather man - at once creature and creator - with no God now but Nature, no priest but Science, no altar but Humanity.

Abolition of personal property, ownership of the soil, buildings, workshops, stores and of anything that is an instrument of labour, production or consumption; Rather, collective property, one and indivisible, held in common.

Abolition of the family, the family based on marriage, the authority of father and spouse and on inheritance; Rather the great family of man, a family as one and indivisible as property. The liberation of woman, the emancipation of the child. At last, the abolition of authority, privilege and strife. Rather, liberty, equality and fraternity embodied in humanity; Instead, all of the implications of the triple formula transplanted from theoretical abstraction to practical reality, to positivism. Which is to say Harmony, the oasis of our dreams, no longer fleeing like a mirage before the caravan of generations but delivering to each and every one of us, under its fraternal auspices and in universal unity, the sources of happiness, the fruits of liberty: a life of delights at last after more than eighteen centuries' worth of agony in the desert wastes of civilization!" (Joseph Déjacque, "The Revolutionary Question", 1854)

And so here, in five quotations, is a basis for anarchy, an equality in social and personal liberty free from entities (like Capital, Property, Law, Government, Religion, Family and State) which can only operate, if they exist as they have come to be, to constrict, constrain and ultimately destroy such liberty because they institute relations which work against it. All in all this anarchy is an anti-authoritarian ethic, against, that is, external

authorities which imagine to control and incarcerate the individual or the mass of individuals. Personal and social liberty is the foundation stone of anarchy so understood: agency, autonomy and free association, the imaginary of self-organisation because life, as of its nature, is self-organising. Consequently, no authority is, or can be, legitimate to which I have not myself freely and voluntarily consented and my sovereignty, the sovereignty of each human individual, existent simply because they exist, is a non-transferable, non-acquirable thing. Anarchy is the belief in human independence and always voluntary interdependence.

Yet anarchy is not (and is never) simply just one thing however anchored in this imaginary it might be and so how these general principles are interpreted, applied and taken forward very much depends upon time and place, upon the conditions and circumstances of the individual or social group concerned. Some apply it politically and generally, talking of future utopias, some apply it philosophically as William Godwin did, some engage in an economic and class analysis, some concentrate on very practical things like working conditions (wherein we get syndicalism and syndicalist anarchists) whilst others, who abhor work (not least in terms of the conditions under which it is expected to be carried out), preach illegalist and nihilist and egoist manifestos. Some (randomish) examples of these differences of emphases and application are as follows:

"All that individuals can do is formulate, clarify, and propagate ideas expressing the instinctive desires of the people, and contribute their constant efforts to the revolutionary organization of the natural powers of the masses. This and nothing more; all the rest can be accomplished only by the people themselves. Otherwise we would end up with a political dictatorship - the reconstitution of the State, with all its privileges, inequalities, and

oppressions; by taking a devious but inevitable path we would come to re-establish the political , social , and economic slavery of the masses . . .

Contrary to the belief of authoritarian communists - which I deem completely wrong - that a social revolution must be decreed and organized either by a dictatorship or by a constituent assembly emerging from a political revolution, our friends, the Paris socialists, believed that revolution could neither be made nor brought to its full development except by the spontaneous and continued action of the masses, the groups and the associations of the people.

Our Paris friends were right a thousand times over. In fact, where is the mind, brilliant as it may be, or - if we speak of a collective dictatorship, even if it were formed of several hundred individuals endowed with superior mentalities – where are the intellects powerful enough to embrace the infinite multiplicity and diversity of real interests, aspirations, wishes, and needs which sum up the collective will of the people? And to invent a social organization that will not be a Procrustean bed upon which the violence of the State will more or less overtly force unhappy society to stretch out? It has always been thus, and it is exactly this old system of organisation by force that the Social Revolution should end by granting full liberty to the masses, the groups, the communes, the associations and to the individuals as well; by destroying once and for all the historic cause of all violence, which is the power and indeed the mere existence of the State. Its fall will bring down with it all the inequities of the law and all the lies of the various religions, since both law and religion have never been anything but the compulsory consecration, ideal and real, of all violence represented, guaranteed, and protected by the State . . .

The future social organization should be carried out from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, starting with the associations, then going on to the communes, the regions, the nations, and, finally, culminating in a great international and universal federation. It is only then that the true, life-giving social order of liberty and general welfare will come into being, a social order which, far from restricting, will affirm and reconcile the interests of individuals and of society.” (Mikhail Bakunin, “The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State”, 1871)

“ANARCHY, TODAY, IS ATTACK; it is war against every authority, every power, every State. In the future society, Anarchy will be defence, the prevention of the re-establishment of any authority, any power, any State: Full and complete liberty of the individual who, freely and driven only by his needs, by his tastes and his sympathies, unites with other individuals in a group or association; free development of the association, which is federated with others in the commune or the district; free development of the communes which are federated in the region; and so on - the regions in the nation; the nations in humanity.

Communism, the question which particularly concerns us today, is the second term of our revolutionary ideal. Communism, at present, is still attack; it is not the destruction of authority, but it is the taking of possession, in the name of all humanity, of all the wealth existing in the world. In the future society, Communism will be the enjoyment of all existing wealth by all men and according to the principle: FROM EACH ACCORDING TO HIS FACULTIES TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS NEEDS, that is to say: FROM EACH AND TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

It is, however, necessary to point out - and this above all in reply to our opponents, the authoritarian communists or Statists - that the taking of possession and the enjoyment of

all the existing wealth must be, according to us, the deed of the people itself: Because the people, humanity, is not the same as the individuals who managed to seize the wealth and hold it in their hands. Some have tried to conclude from this, it is true, that we should for this reason establish a whole class of rulers - of representatives and trustees of the commonwealth. But we do not share this opinion. No intermediaries; representatives who always end by representing only themselves; no mediators of equality, anymore than mediators of liberty; no new government, no new State, whether it is called Popular or Democratic, Revolutionary or Provisional!

Since the commonwealth is spread over the whole earth, and since all of it belongs by right to the whole of humanity, those who find this wealth within their reach and are in a position to use it will use it in common. The people of some country will use the land, the machines, the workshops, the houses, etc., . . of the country, and they will make use of it in common. Since they are part of humanity, they will exercise here, by deed and directly, their right to a share of the human wealth. But if an inhabitant of Peking came into this country, he would have the same rights as the others: he would enjoy, in common with the others, all the wealth of the country, in the same way that he had done in Peking . . ." (Carlo Cafiero, "Anarchy and Communism", 1880)

"Political economy has hitherto insisted chiefly upon division. We proclaim integration; and we maintain that the ideal of society - that is, the state towards which society is already marching - is a society of integrated, combined labour. A society where each individual is a producer of both manual and intellectual work; where each able-bodied human being is a worker, and where each worker works both in the field and the industrial workshop; where every aggregation of individuals, large enough to dispose of a certain variety of natural

resources - it may be a nation, or rather a region - produces and itself consumes most of its own agricultural and manufactured produce . . .

The scattering of industries over the country - so as to bring the factory amidst the fields, to make agriculture derive all those profits which it always finds in being combined with industry . . . and to produce a combination of industrial with agricultural work - is surely the next step to be made, as soon as a reorganization of our present conditions is possible . . . This step is imposed by the very necessity of producing for the producers themselves. It is imposed by the necessity for each healthy man and woman to spend a part of their lives in manual work in the free air; and it will be rendered the more necessary when the great social movements, which have now become unavoidable, come to disturb the present international trade, and compel each nation to revert to her own resources for her own maintenance. Humanity as a whole, as well as each separate individual, will be gainers by the change, and the change will take place . . .

We maintain that in the interests of both science and industry, as well as of society as a whole, every human being, without distinction of birth, ought to receive such an education as would enable him, or her, to combine a thorough knowledge of science with a thorough knowledge of handicraft. We fully recognize the necessity of specialization of knowledge, but we maintain that specialization must follow general education, and that general education must be given in science and handicraft alike. To the division of society into brain workers and manual workers we oppose the combination of both kinds of activities; and instead of 'technical education,' which means the maintenance of the present division between brain work and manual work, we advocate education integrate, or complete education, which means the disappearance of that pernicious distinction . . .

*Have the factory and the workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens, and work in them. Not those large establishments, of course, in which huge masses of metals have to be dealt with and which are better placed at certain spots indicated by Nature, but the countless variety of workshops and factories which are required to satisfy the infinite diversity of tastes among civilized men. Not those factories in which children lose all the appearance of children in the atmosphere of an industrial hell, but those airy and hygienic, and consequently economical, factories in which human life is of more account than machinery and the making of extra profits, of which we already find a few samples here and there; factories and workshops into which men, women and children will not be driven by hunger, but will be attracted by the desire of finding an activity suited to their tastes, and where, aided by the motor and the machine, they will choose the branch of activity which best suits their inclinations..." (Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*, 1898)*

"What, then, is Anarchy in practice? The whole organization of society stripped of power, domination or the authority of some over others.

According to this definition, we shall have this: hierarchies not existing in a society organized along anarchist lines, the system being founded upon the free will of all its individuals . . .

[Administration is] the only thing required by and indispensable in any civilized society, or, to put it at its plainest, in any collective body. And in order to carry out the Administration in a manner whereby no one abdicates his rights or his autonomy, commissions or delegations are elected as the collective deems useful.

. . . Since a collective as a whole cannot write a letter or forward a sum of money, or do an infinity of tasks which only individuals can perform, it follows that delegating these tasks to the most qualified person subject to a code of conduct prescribed in advance, is not only not an abdication of freedom but rather the accomplishment of the most sacred duty of anarchy, which is the organization of Administration.

Let us suppose that a workers' body is set up without a steering committee or any hierarchical office; that it meets in a general assembly once a week or more often, at which everything pertinent to its operations is decided; that it chooses receivers, a treasurer, a bookkeeper, an archivist, a secretary, etc., to collect dues, retain its funds, audit its accounts, handle its archives and correspondence, etc., or appoints a commission with exclusively administrative functions and with a defined code of conduct or Imperative Mandate: the organization of that society would be perfectly anarchist . . .

Then let us take a look at the municipality of the future, organized along anarchist lines... the unit of organization would still be the trades section in each locality.

. . . [I]n order to organize an anarchist municipality, each unit (trades section) would delegate one or more persons with purely administrative powers or with an imperative mandate so that they could form a municipal or local administrative commission. These persons, subject to replacement and recall at any time through the ongoing suffrage of those who have given them their mandates, could never set themselves up as dictators...

All commissions or delegations appointed in an anarchist society should at all times be liable to replacement and recall through ongoing balloting of the Section or Sections by

which they have been elected, thereby making it impossible for anybody to stake a claim to even the slightest bit of authority .

. . . [A]narchy is the abolition of all of the existing powers that be, political and religious, and of what is miscalled economic authority; but it is more than just the abolition, being also the replacement, not of some authorities by some others . . . but of one social order by another, of one social organization . . . by another . . . founded upon the consent of all its associates. The political State and theology would thus be supplanted by Administration and Science.

. . . [A]s anarchists we want knowledge to be accessible to all, we want the most comprehensively rounded education for every individual, so that in creating a society of free men, we might also be making one of intelligent beings. Thus by making education the cornerstone of the anarchist system, we have . . . the finest and most wholesome barrier against harmful passions; whereas authority uses punishment in order to repress, knowledge makes [us] moral through persuasion and by making this understood: that every human entitlement carries within itself an imprescriptible obligation to respect others. In short, we have seen what anarchy is: abolition of all the existing powers that be and their replacement by the labour body in its various manifestations . . .

What we mean by collectivism is a society organized on the basis of collective ownership, economic federation and the complete emancipation of the human being . . . [In the collectivist society] the individual will be required to work in order to meet his needs as is presently the case and will also be the case tomorrow. Combination is the only option if more and better is to be produced. From which it follows that, of their own volition, people will organize themselves into producer associations and federations that will oversee the

exchange of products with one another at cost. Thus the factory corporation will oversee the administration of the factories where all their members will be working; the shoemakers their workshops; the type-setters their presses; the farmworkers the land; the miners their mines, the seamen their vessels, etc., etc.

All citizens, assembled in a local congress, will look into and determine the educational establishments and organize the staffing of assistance and security, public works, hygiene, statistics, etc., which organizational set-up may at any time be revised by congresses, on the advice of groups or of commissions elected for that very purpose . . .

In each of the regions that will naturally be formed - in that many of the current political boundaries are arbitrary - the Trades Federations and Communal Federations will set up purely administrative federal commissions, and, as the body liaising between all the Unions, Federations and Communes, will look after all regional public services . . . as well as all roads, railways, telegraphs, canals, general statistics, etc. [The Commission] of one Region will oversee the maintenance of relations with the other regional commissions for the sake of solidarity and universal harmony, as well as for all matters of an international or cosmopolitan character.

. . . [M]an will be free in the productive society; every worker group will be free within the local and Trades Federation; the localities will be free within their Counties or Regions, and the Regions free within the entire human family which will finally have achieved its complete redemption." (Jose Llunas Pujols, "What is Anarchy?", 1882)

"Anarchists do not comprise a political party, since our scorn for the state forecloses our treading on the same ground with it and especially since we despise bargaining and

haggling. We Anarchists want to be preachers: a revolution of spirit is, for us, the first order. What end can come from the obstinacy of today's elite when they repress the aspirations and desires of the masses of our people? We shall not abdicate responsibility, rather, we will quietly take it on, safe in the knowledge that future generations will thank us for helping them respect themselves once again. The consciousness that we will not only not see the culmination of our victory, but rather will suffer fresh disappointments and setbacks – to say nothing of persecution – will not hold us back. In spite of this, we will devote ourselves to our life's work and to the expansion of enlightenment to all layers of society. We think, along with Schopenhauer: 'Life is short and even though truth appears remote, the truth lives long: so tell the truth!' Of course, most anyone, after a bit of honest and courageous study, can name his own truth. Whoever believes it is in order to demand the imposition of 'his Truth' along with the violent suppression of those with a divergent belief, may wish to wander down that road. The anarchists will walk down theirs." (Gustav Landauer, "Anarchism in Germany", 1895)

"The individualist anarchist stands apart from the communist anarchist in this regard, that (besides ownership of the consumer goods representing an extension of his personality) he regards ownership of the means of production and free disposal of his produce as the quintessential guarantee of the autonomy of the individual. The understanding is that such ownership boils down to the chance to deploy (as individuals, couples, family groups, etc.) the requisite plot of soil or machinery of production to meet the requirements of the social unit, provided that the proprietor does not transfer it to someone else or rely upon the services of someone else in operating it. The individualist anarchist draws the line at living at any price. . . He argues that he has an entitlement to defend himself against any social context (State, society, milieu, grouping, etc.) that will countenance, agree to, perpetuate, sanction or facilitate:

a) subordination of the individual to the milieu, the former being placed in a manifestly inferior position in that he cannot deal with the other on a man-to-man, equal-to-equal basis;

b) (in any context) mandatory mutual aid, solidarity and association;

c) denial of the individual's inalienable title to the means of production and to the full and unrestricted disposal of produce;

d) the exploitation of anyone by one of his neighbours who will set him to work in his employ and for his benefit;

e) greed, which is to say the opportunity for an individual, couple or family group to own more than strictly required for their normal upkeep;

f) the monopoly enjoyed by the State or any form of executive which might take its place, which is to say its meddling in a centralising, administrative, directive or organizational capacity in relations between individuals, in any sphere whatever;

g) lending for interest, usury, speculation, monetary exchange rates, inheritance, etc.

. . . Relations between individualist anarchists are founded upon a basis of 'reciprocity.' 'Comradeship' is essentially on an individual basis and is never imposed. A 'comrade' is someone with whom they, as Individuals, are pleased to associate, someone who makes an appreciable effort to feel alive, who participates in their propagation of educational

criticism and selection of persons; who respects the individual's style of life and does not trespass against the development of his fellow-traveller and his nearest and dearest.

The individualist anarchist is never slave to some model formula or received text. He acknowledges only opinions. He has only theses to propose. And acknowledges no boundary. If he espouses a particular lifestyle, it is in order to derive greater freedom, greater happiness, greater well-being from it and not in order to sacrifice himself to it. And he tinkers with it and reshapes it when he realizes that remaining faithful to it would do injury to his autonomy. He has no desire to let himself be governed by a priori principles: he builds his behavioural code, a posteriori, upon his experiences and it is never final and is at all times subject to such amendments and changes as further experience and the need to equip himself with fresh weapons in his battle with his surroundings may recommend . . .

The individualist anarchist is only ever answerable to himself for his deeds and actions.

The individualist anarchist looks upon association merely as an expedient, a makeshift arrangement. So only in urgent circumstances is he willing to enter into association and then only of his own free will. And, as a general rule, he is willing to enter into short-term arrangements only, it being understood throughout that every contract can be voided the moment it injures one of the contracting parties.

The individualist anarchist decrees no fixed sexual morality. It is up to each to determine his sexual, affective or sentimental life, as much for one sex as for the other. What is essential is that in intimate relations between anarchists of differing sexes neither violence nor constraint take place. He thinks that economic independence and the possibility of being a mother as she pleases are the initial conditions for the emancipation of woman.

The individualist anarchist wants to live, wants to be able to appreciate life individually — life considered in all its manifestations. He remains meanwhile master of his will, considering his knowledge, his faculties, his senses, and the multiple organs of perception of his body as so many servitors put at the disposition of his self. He is not a coward, but he does not want to diminish himself. And he knows well that he who allows himself to be led by his passions or dominated by his penchants is a slave. He wants to maintain 'the mastery of the self' in order to advance towards the adventures to which independent research and free study lead him. He will willingly advocate a simple life, the renunciation of false, enslaving, useless needs; avoidance of the large cities; a rational diet and bodily hygiene.

The individualist anarchist will interest himself in the associations formed by certain comrades with an eye to ridding themselves of obsession with a milieu which disgusts them. The refusal of military service, or of paying taxes, will have all his sympathy; free unions, single or plural, as a protestation against ordinary morals; illegalism as the violent rupture (and with certain reservations) of an economic contract imposed by force; abstention from every action, from every labour, from every function involving the maintenance or consolidation of the imposed intellectual, ethical or economic regime; the exchange of vital products between individualist anarchist possessors of the necessary engines of production, apart from every capitalist intermediary; etc., are acts of revolt agreeing essentially with the character of individualist anarchism." (E. Armand, "Mini-Manual of the Anarchist Individualist", 1911)

"At the outset anarchists must renounce the warfare of army against army, battles arrayed on fields, struggles laid out by strategists and tacticians manoeuvring armed bodies as the chess-player manoeuvres his figures upon the chess-board. The struggle should be directed chiefly towards the destruction of institutions. The burning up of deeds, registers of land-

surveys, proceedings of notaries and solicitors, tax-collectors' books; the ignoring of the limits of holdings, destruction of the regulations of the civil staff, etc.; the expropriation of the capitalists, taking possession in the name of all, putting articles of consumption freely at the disposal of all - all this is the work of small and scattered groups, of skirmishes, not regular battles. And this is the warfare which the Anarchists must seek to encourage everywhere in order to harass government, compel them to scatter their forces; tire them out and decimate them piecemeal. No need of leaders for blows like these; as soon as someone realizes what should be done he preaches by example, acting so as to attract others to him, who follow him if they are partisans of the enterprise but do not, by the fact of their adherence, abdicate their own initiative in following him who seems most fit to direct the enterprise, especially since someone else may, in the course of the struggle, perceive the possibility of another manoeuvre, whereupon he will not go and ask authority from the first to make the attempt but will make it known to those who are struggling with him. These, in turn, will assist or reject the undertaking as seems most practicable.

In Anarchy those who know teach those who do not know; the first to conceive an idea puts it into practice, explaining it to those whom he wishes to interest in it. But there is no temporary abdication, no authority; there are only equals who mutually aid each other according to their respective faculties, abandoning none of their rights, no part of their autonomy. The surest means of making Anarchy triumph is to act like an Anarchist . . .

'The end justifies the means' is the motto of the Jesuits, which some Anarchists have thought fit to apply to Anarchy, but which is not in reality applicable save to him who seeks egoistic satisfaction for his purely personal needs, without troubling himself about those whom he wounds or crushes by the way. When satisfaction is sought in the exercise of

justice and solidarity the means employed must always be adapted to the end, under pain of producing the exact contrary of one's expectations." (Jean Grave, "Means and Ends", 1893)

"The age of veneration for Governments, notwithstanding all the hypnotic influence they employ to maintain their position, is more and more passing away. And it is time for people to understand that not only are Governments not necessary, but are harmful and most highly immoral institutions, in which an honest, self-respecting man cannot and must not take part, and the advantages of which he cannot and should not enjoy.

And as soon as people clearly understand that, they will naturally cease to take part in such deeds - that is, cease to give the Governments soldiers and money. And as soon as a majority of people ceases to do this, the fraud which enslaves people will be abolished. Only in this way can people be freed from slavery.

. . . [I]f a man, whether slave or slave owner, really wishes to better not his position alone, but the position of people in general, he must not himself do those wrong things which enslave him and his brothers. In order not to do the evil which produces misery for himself and for his brothers, he should firstly neither willingly nor under compulsion take any part in Government activity, and should therefore be neither a soldier, nor a Field Marshal, nor a Minister of State, nor a tax collector, nor a witness, nor an alderman, nor a juryman, nor a governor, nor a Member of Parliament, nor, in fact, hold any office connected with violence. That is one thing.

Secondly, such a man should not voluntarily pay taxes to Governments, either directly or indirectly; nor should he accept money collected by taxes, either as salary, or as pension, or

as a reward; nor should he make use of Government institutions, supported by taxes collected by violence from the people. That is the second thing.

Thirdly, such a man should not appeal to Government violence for the protection of his own possessions in land or in other things, nor to defend him and his near ones; but should only possess land and all products of his own or other people's toil in so far as others do not claim them from him. 'But such an activity is impossible; to refuse all participation in Government affairs, means to refuse to live,' is what people will say. 'A man who refuses military service will be imprisoned; a man who does not pay taxes will be punished, and the tax will be collected from his property; a man who, having no other means of livelihood, refuses Government service, will perish of hunger with his family; the same will befall a man who rejects Government protection for his property and his person; not to make use of things that are taxed, or of Government institutions, is quite impossible, as the most necessary articles are often taxed; and just in the same way it is impossible to do without Government institutions, such as the post, the roads, etc.... '

There is only one way to abolish Government violence: that people should abstain from participating in violence. Therefore, whether it be difficult or not to abstain from participating in governmental violence, and whether the good results of such abstinence will or will not be soon apparent, are superfluous questions; because to liberate people from slavery there is only that one way, and no other!" (Leo Tolstoy, "On Non-Violent Resistance", 1900)

"By force our ancestors liberated themselves from political oppression, by force their children will have to liberate themselves from economic bondage. 'It is, therefore, your right, it is your duty,' says Jefferson - 'to arm!'

What we would achieve is, therefore, plainly and simply:

First:- Destruction of the existing class rule, by all means, i.e., by energetic, relentless, revolutionary and international action.

Second:- Establishment of a free society based upon co-operative organization of production.

Third:- Free exchange of equivalent products by and between the productive organizations without commerce and profit-mongery.

Fourth:- Organization of education on a secular, scientific and equal basis for both sexes.

Fifth:- Equal rights for all without distinction of sex or race.

Sixth:- Regulation of all public affairs by free contracts between the autonomous (independent) communes and associations, resting on a federalistic basis.

Whoever agrees with this ideal let him grasp our outstretched brother hands! Proletarians of all countries, unite! Fellow-workmen, all we need for the achievement of this great end is ORGANIZATION and UNITY!

There exists now no great obstacle to that unity. The work of peaceful education and revolutionary conspiracy well can and ought to run in parallel lines. The day has come for solidarity. Join our ranks! Let the drum beat defiantly the roll of battle: 'Workmen of all countries unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains; you have a world to win!'

Tremble, oppressors of the world! Not far beyond your purblind sight there dawns the scarlet and sable lights of the JUDGMENT DAY!" ("The Pittsburgh Proclamation", 1883)

"THE NEW WATCHWORD 'NO MORE POLITICKING!' had spread through the workshops. A number of union members deserted the churches devoted to the cult of electioneering. So the trade union terrain seemed to some anarchists ripe to receive and nurture their doctrine, and came to the aid of those who, freed at last of parliamentary tutelage, now strove to focus their attention and that of their comrades upon the study of economic laws.

This entry into the trade union of some libertarians made a considerable impact. For one thing, it taught the masses the true meaning of anarchism, a doctrine which, in order to make headway can very readily, let us say it again, manage without the individual dynamiter; and, through a natural linkage of ideas, it showed union members what this trades organization of which they had previously had only the narrowest conception is and may yet become.

Nobody believes or expects that the coming revolution, however formidable it should be, will realize unadulterated anarchist communism. By virtue of the fact that it will erupt, no doubt, before the work of anarchist education has been completed, men will not be quite mature enough to organize themselves absolutely without assistance, and for a long time yet the demands of caprice will stifle the voice of reason in them. As a result (and this seems a good time to spell it out), while we do preach perfect communism, it is not in the certainty or expectation of communism's being the social form of the future: it is in order to further men's education, and round it off as completely as possible, so that, by the time that the day of conflagration comes, they will have attained maximum emancipation. But must the transitional state to be endured necessarily or inevitably be the collectivist [state socialist] jail? Might it not consist of libertarian organization confined to the needs of production and consumption alone, with all political institutions having been done away with? Such is the problem with which many minds have – rightly – been grappling for many a long year.

Now, what is the trade union? An association which one is free to join or quit, one without a president, with no officials other than a secretary and a treasurer subject to instant revocation, of men who study and debate kindred professional concerns. And who are these men? Producers, the very same who create all public wealth. Do they await the approval of the law before they come together, reach agreement and act? No: as far as they are concerned, lawful constitution is merely an amusing means of making revolutionary propaganda under government guarantee, and anyway, how many of them do not and will not ever figure in the unions' formal annual returns?

Do they use the parliamentary mechanism in order to arrive at their resolutions? Not any more: they hold discussions and the most widely-held view has the force of law, but it is a law without sanction, observed precisely because it is subject to the endorsement of the individual, except, of course, when it comes to resisting the employers. Finally, while they appoint a chairman, a delegated supervisor, for every session, this is not now the result of habit, for, once appointed, that chairman is utterly overlooked and himself frequently forgets the powers vested in him by his comrades. As a laboratory of economic struggles, detached from election contests, favouring the general strike with all that that implies, governing itself along anarchic lines, the trade union is thus the simultaneously revolutionary and libertarian organization that alone will be able to counter and successfully reduce the noxious influence of the collectivist politicians. Suppose now that, on the day the revolution breaks out, virtually every single producer is organized into the unions: will these not represent, ready to step into the shoes of the present organization, a quasi-libertarian organization, in fact suppressing all political power, an organization whose every part, being master of the instruments of production, would settle all of its affairs for itself, in sovereign fashion and through the freely given consent of its members? And would this not amount to the 'free association of free producers?'...

Let free men then enter the trade union, and let the propagation of their ideas prepare the workers, the artisans of wealth there to understand that they should regulate their affairs for themselves, and then, when the time comes, smash not only existing political forms, but any attempt to reconstitute a new power. That will show the authorities how well-founded was their fear, posing as disdain of 'syndicalism,' and how ephemeral was their teaching, evaporated before it was even able to put down roots!" (Fernand Pelloutier, "Anarchism and the Workers' Unions", 1895)

"The dominant, almost general, idea of revolution - particularly the Socialist idea - is that revolution is a violent change of social conditions through which one social class, the working class, becomes dominant over another class, the capitalist class. It is the conception of a purely physical change, and as such it involves only political scene shifting and institutional rearrangements. Bourgeois dictatorship is replaced by the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' - or by that of its 'advance guard,' the Communist Party; Lenin takes the seat of the Romanovs, the Imperial Cabinet is rechristened Soviet of People's Commissars, Trotsky is appointed Minister of War, and a labourer becomes the Military Governor General of Moscow. That is, in essence, the Bolshevik conception of revolution, as translated into actual practice. And with a few minor alterations it is also the idea of revolution held by all other Socialist parties.

This conception is inherently and fatally false. Revolution is indeed a violent process. But if it is to result only in a change of dictatorship, in a shifting of names and political personalities, then it is hardly worthwhile. It is surely not worth all the struggle and sacrifice, the stupendous loss in human life and cultural values that result from every revolution. If such a revolution were even to bring greater social well being (which has not been the case in Russia) then it would also not be worth the terrific price paid: mere

improvement can be brought about without bloody revolution. It is not palliatives or reforms that are the real aim and purpose of revolution, as I conceive it.

In my opinion - a thousandfold strengthened by the Russian experience – the great mission of revolution, of the SOCIAL REVOLUTION, is a FUNDAMENTAL TRANSVALUATION OF VALUES. A transvaluation not only of social, but also of human values. The latter are even pre-eminent, for they are the basis of all social values. Our institutions and conditions rest upon deep-seated ideas. To change those conditions and at the same time leave the underlying ideas and values intact means only a superficial transformation, one that cannot be permanent or bring real betterment. It is a change of form only, not of substance, as so tragically proven by Russia...

There is no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing, while methods and tactics are another. This conception is a potent menace to social regeneration. All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual habit and social practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical. From the day of my arrival in Russia I felt it, at first vaguely, then ever more consciously and clearly. The great and inspiring aims of the Revolution became so clouded with and obscured by the methods used by the ruling political power that it was hard to distinguish what was temporary means and what final purpose. Psychologically and socially the means necessarily influence and alter the aims. The whole history of man is continuous proof of the maxim that to divest one's methods of ethical concepts means to sink into the depths of utter demoralization. In that lies the real tragedy of the Bolshevik philosophy as applied to the Russian Revolution. May this lesson not be in vain.

No revolution can ever succeed as a factor of liberation unless the MEANS used to further it be identical in spirit and tendency with the PURPOSES to be achieved. Revolution is the negation of the existing, a violent protest against man's inhumanity to man with all the thousand and one slaveries it involves. It is the destroyer of dominant values upon which a complex system of injustice, oppression, and wrong has been built up by ignorance and brutality. It is the herald of NEW VALUES, ushering in a transformation of the basic relations of man to man, and of man to society. It is not a mere reformer, patching up some social evils; not a mere changer of forms and institutions; not only a re-distributor of social well-being. It is all that, yet more, much more. It is, first and foremost, the TRANSVALUATOR, the bearer of new values. It is the great TEACHER of the NEW ETHICS, inspiring man with a new concept of life and its manifestations in social relationships. It is the mental and spiritual regenerator...

It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that revolution is in vain unless inspired by its ultimate ideal. Revolutionary methods must be in tune with revolutionary aims. The means used to further the revolution must harmonize with its purposes. In short, the ethical values which the revolution is to establish in the new society must be initiated with the revolutionary activities of the so-called transitional period. The latter can serve as a real and dependable bridge to the better life only if built of the same material as the life to be achieved. Revolution is the mirror of the coming day; it is the child that is to be the Man of Tomorrow." (Emma Goldman, "The Transvaluation of Values", 1924)

(The above quotations all came from Robert Graham's *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume One*.)

"The word right has the same fundamental meaning as straight. When no obstacle stands or lies between an animal and the object of its desire, the shortest way, which is a straight line, is the way the animal takes to reach the object; but when approach by a right line is impractical the nearest known path is chosen, all considerations such as safety being weighed according to intelligence. This is then the line of least resistance -- the one most approximating in convenience to a right line. The right hand is so named because it is usually the stronger and more serviceable. A man's right is his straight way to the satisfaction of his desires, and he takes no other way except under adverse circumstances or hallucination.

It will be objected by Moralists that such an exposition of right reduces it to nothing but might. In this inference they are correct, but their objection does not disturb Egoistic philosophy, which regards their alleged supernal, sacred Right as a superstition. I have a right to do what I can take and openly keep, and another has a right to take it from me if he can. Those, however, who believe that a superior authority has laid down a rule to which they must conform, will take up that rule or law as they understand it, and their idea of right will be that of conformity to the command of that authority. The Moralist is under the impression that instead of pursuing his own pleasure he has to fulfill a purpose that is at variance with his pleasure. His conception of Right is not an Egoistic conception. He has surrendered himself, and with himself his own right, and has begun to serve an abstraction. He is in the way to commit great folly and wrong to himself. To the Moralist Right and Wrong are two fixed ideas, forever in opposition in all senses. To the intelligent Egoist they are two words generally perverted from their meanings and used as scarecrows.

There is a frequent clash between the right of one and the right of another, and they fight it out. It is settled by the triumph of one and the defeat of the other. Max Stirner in his

matchless book "The Ego and Its Own," says: if it suits me, it is right. I assert my full power to do my own pleasure and nothing but my own pleasure. The Moralist consents to serve as his own jailer; not so the Egoist. Assert your right, your power, your pleasure. I claim none of that, I assert my own. I appeal to no moral law of the world. I recognize none. We shall find our interests coincide or we shall give each other battle or we shall steer clear of each other, according to circumstances." (James L. Walker, "The Philosophy of Egoism", 1905)

(Taken from *Enemies of Society: An Anthology of Individualist and Egoist Thought*.)

I trust that, reading those various selections from the anarchist past, you will concur with me that they are not simply all the same. Some, indeed, would even seemingly, and with some certainly, be disputed by the authors of some of the others. All have a fundamental concern with personal and social liberty but they don't all then come to the same conclusions about how, or with what aim, it should work. This, I would contend, is as it should be for situations, conditions and needs will always be different. People should be at liberty to organise themselves accordingly. Indeed, that seems entirely the point. In this there are some of those quotes, in both their thrust and their specifics, that I would certainly take issue with myself (I haven't just posted quotes I liked). But that shouldn't be remotely surprising. To each their own and the responsibility for actioning and making workable your appreciation of anarchist principles and ethics is always your own business. Consequently, some of the quotes I used were very much anarchy with or as a cause. But others were not. And here our vantage point 100-175 years after these quotes were first pronounced comes into play for where some of the speakers seemed to find "the social revolution" basically inevitable, now, today, we can have much less confidence about this in an era of total surveillance, constant police presence and global war conducted by spy satellite and Executive Order. The workers did not break their chains. The chains got

thicker and their grip got tighter. And a new, pernicious enemy appeared on the horizon, the consequences of just three centuries of industrial activity for reason of private profit called “climate change”.

For me, this precipitates a firm and final break with the notion of “the cause” when this is anything to do with social utopias (socialist or solarpunk) or “the Social Revolution”. In truth, it should have been questioned before. For how was it proposed that not just examples of actually existing states but THE STATE itself as an idea was to be eradicated? Even if this be imagined an educational thing (which seems best), this could hardly be something that happened overnight. What are we supposed to do in the meantime? How is EVERY state to be eradicated in a situation in which even one state being eradicated would likely lead other states to stick their own noses in for fear of being next or allowing a revolutionary fervour to sweep across their own territories? (Compare the reactions of other nations in regard to the Spanish Civil War begun in 1936 or Turkish aggression in regard to the north-eastern Syrian area known as “Rojava”.) Anarchy with a cause, anarchy with this cause, comes to seem as complete fantasy in the modern world, it seems to me (the rapidly and exponentially increasing consequences of climate change aside, of course).

But I also imagine that it always should have seemed so. The Social Revolution, a metanarrative, “one size fits all” solution, wasn’t rooted in the now but pined for a future material reality it wasn’t actually in. Readers are to be reminded that the only time anyone can actually affect is the present time, here and now, right now. The anarchist question, it then seems to me, is: *“What are you going to do, right now, to actualise and instantiate your understanding and expression of anarchy?”* This question highlights that anarchy is not about tomorrow, whether it is new, revolutionary or otherwise: it is about

today. It is about now. Your anarchy is now or your anarchy is never. This is anarchy WITHOUT a cause, anarchy in an ever-present, an anarchy that can be anywhere and everywhere, an anarchy that only needs you to imagine it and act upon it for it to be actualised. It is about direct action and self-responsibility that changes and impacts present reality and how people can imagine it. It is not focused on building permanent structures (new prisons) but on being the ungovernable. It does not want to create a world utopia but for people to realise that they already had one if only they would think about how they relate to each other and the consequences of various types of relations.

Sadly, however, we are now all in cages and coerced to be each other's jailers. So what is required, as of first importance, is acts of destruction and disruption which give birth to freedom creation. "Business as usual" must be brought to a stop before it certainly brings itself, and much else besides, to a stop. Yet we act not for this "cause" but because we don't have a cause. What we have is ourselves, our liberty, our anarchy. It was always right there. We just needed to imagine it. And our anarchy is death to "business as usual". Our anarchy is death to authority.

I have a couple of contemporary anarchists to interact with on this theme, both of them anarchists of the "without a cause" type. The first of these is Aragorn! (also known as Aragorn Moser), the former publisher and activist who was zealous in providing literature and thought to people from diverse sources and not always simply that with which he himself agreed. (For example, I am promoting Aragorn's ideas here as "nihilist" because he promoted nihilist ideas himself, acknowledging them as such. But he did not consider himself a nihilist.) Aragorn!, as I understand it, was behind both the website *The Anarchist Library* as well as various publishers of anarchist literature in America such as Little Black Cart. He makes a splash in the nihilist anarchist space not least due to his pamphlet *Boom*:

Introductory Writings on Nihilism which is composed of two essays: “Nihilism, Anarchy and the 21st Century” and “Anarchy and Nihilism: Consequences”. Let’s dig in.

The first essay here is by far the more substantial piece and is half taken up in an explanation of Russian nihilism of the 1860s to the 1880s. Here, quite understandably, “nihilism” has its own contextual meaning and so you can’t then go just giving “nihilism” your own random and modern meaning before projecting it back into nineteenth century Russia. Of this Aragorn! himself says:

“What then was nihilism? Nihilism was a youth movement, a philosophical tendency, and a revolutionary impulse. Nihilism was the valorization of the natural sciences. Nihilism was a specific fashion style. Nihilism was a new approach to aesthetics, criticism and ethics. Nihilism was the contradiction between a studied materialism and the desire to annihilate the social order. Nihilism was also a particularly Russian response to the conditions of Tsarist reform and repression. Nihilism has become much more than it originally would have been capable of because of the viral nature of its value-system, practice, and conclusions.”

What Aragorn! could say here but doesn’t is that people like Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, both born in the then Russian empire around 1870, were both aware of, and affected by, this cultural movement. In fact, I make reference to the nihilist “Revolutionary Catechism” of Sergey Nechayev in my book on Goldman as a background to the start of their anarchist existences. Chernyshevsky’s novel, *What Is To Be Done?*, an expression of educated Russian nihilism, was a favourite of Goldman’s and Berkman’s as also mentioned in my own book. (Its theme is that of a woman who escapes her family and an arranged marriage to seek her own economic independence so it is hardly surprising it struck a chord with Goldman!) “Nihilism”, in the Russian sense, was both a

middle class cultural movement for educated and concerned citizens who wanted to be progressive but also something potentially revolutionary in political terms. It was called “nihilism” because it seemed to want to sweep away cultural foundations which, to those relying on them, seems to leave nothing. Thus, the nihilist “believes in nothing”. Russian nihilism was neither a very deep nor very long lasting philosophy and when it entered its revolutionary stage, complete with secret societies and imagined secret societies, and assassinated the Russian Tsar in 1881, it largely sounded its own death knell too.

Aragorn’s commentary on the Russian nihilists’ most noted historical act, however, is worth noting:

“After the dissolution of Land and Freedom, People’s Will [secret societies] devoted themselves to the assassination of the Tsar. They did not see this death as linked to a larger social struggle. They did not have the infrastructure, social solution, or desire to assume power, and believed that the institution of the Russian autocracy was firmly in place. Their desire was not a coup, it was vengeance. The nihilists also held on to the belief that if their positive actions towards social change (like their organizing of the peasants) were so easily thwarted by the malevolence-of-neglect by the state then negative action (like assassination) would more likely result in substantive change in the system. Finally there was a fatalist and deeply-held belief that destruction was worthwhile for its own sake, and not because of humanitarian, political, or social reasons.”

We may note here that, as is the nature of the case, assassinations, or similar events, do not bring in their train either the means or the ability to instantly create new social formations. (So the sarcastic comment of Fernand Pelloutier, above in my quotations, about men with dynamite.) As the example of an anarchism of the cause, then, such

things are singular failures. Between 1881, with this nihilist-committed assassination, and the assassination, twenty years later, of the American President by Leon Czolgosz, multiple heads of state or other royal personages were assassinated. But in not one single case did “the social revolution” advance even one single iota. If a cause was meant to be advanced by such activity then it was an abject failure. But not if it wasn’t. If each was an act done because it was worthwhile for its own sake then they were all a success.

Aragorn! has an interesting thesis as to how nihilism fits into the story of anarchism. In distinction to that “libertarian socialism” which was all about federations, workingmen’s associations and contractual relations and the like, he sees nihilism coming to the party in the guise of “propaganda by the deed” or “the Russian innovations of nihilism”, as he calls it. This is as a kind of negation to the imagined positive case of “The Social Revolution” which aims at utopian new worlds. But how does one build such a world if the land is already built on and called “property” and “capital” guaranteed by the force and violence of a state? One requires destruction, that which will sweep the old away to make room for the new. There can, in fact, be no “new” while the “old” remains (as the current genocidal Israeli regime seems to understand). So, we may imagine, whilst some fix on “positive” agendas, others go about the business of destruction, a propaganda by the deed which, claims Aragorn!, is “the primary historical vehicle by which we know anarchism”. (This is embarrassing for the “Social Revolution” types and so they keep pushing it away from themselves and pretending this was nothing to do with them.) Aragorn! continues:

“The difference between ‘propaganda by the deed’ and the nihilist practice of assassination is intention. The anarchists continued, due to their relationship to Socialism, to believe in a positive, progressive route toward their social ends and to be engaged in violence against heads of states and their lackeys with the (utopian) belief that the population bearing

witness to these acts would both see the fallibility of power and would rise up to fill this void. The nihilists had no positive intentions. In the parlance of modern anarchism they only desired to take direct action against great offense."

Here we see in bold relief the "with a cause" and the "without a cause". Aragorn! parses it by reference to different concepts of history, the first a socialist conception all about progress and progressivism (called "historical materialism" by Marxists) but, when it comes to nihilism:

"The Nihilist concept of history was not progressive. The Nihilist's opposition to the state is just a special case of his or her opposition to almost everything: the family, traditional art, bourgeois culture, comfortable middle-aged people, the British monarchy, etc., and is not oriented around their formulation of how to achieve a better world."

The nihilist, then, is not at all concerned with a metanarrative about "the world" and whether that narrative has tilted upwards or downwards lately. The nihilist is neither particularly convinced that such a metanarrative is anything they can affect but also unconvinced that it is anything with which they should be particularly concerned. Aragorn! continues:

"What Nihilism provides then is an alternative to the alternative that does not embed an idealist image of the new world it would create. It is not an Idealist project. Nihilism states that it is not useful to talk about the society you 'hold in your stomach', the things you would do 'if only you got power', or the vision that you believe that we all share. What is useful is the negation of the existing world. Nihilism is the political philosophy that begins with the negation of this world. What exists beyond those gates has yet to be written."

When it comes to “nihilism as strategy” this then becomes the following for Aragorn!:

“A definition of nihilism could be the realization ‘that conditions in the social organization are so bad as to make destruction desirable for its own sake independent of any constructive program or possibility.’ This exposes one of the greatest idealistic flaws of modern activism: The articulation of the specific world-to-be as a result of your actions does not guarantee that world’s creation.”

Here, again, we see the distinction between the socialist-inspired progressive worldview and the nihilist one. The latter here recognises that action with an aim in the future or for a cause holds no guarantees. Frankly, you often have no clue what will happen next, let alone that it is what you want. Thus, you get anarchist notables like Kropotkin and others looking a bit silly in their promising that “the Revolution” is inevitably just around the corner like St. Paul in the New Testament who expects the Second Coming any day now. (Still no word on that one either.) The nihilist does not concern themselves with second comings. They concentrate, to follow through with the analogy, on doing down and getting free of the Romans. Just because they can. So although anarchism and nihilism are separate things which have a coming together in Aragorn’s narrative, they both share an attachment to some words from Bakunin:

“Let us put our trust in the eternal spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unsearchable and eternally creative source of all life. The desire for destruction is also a creative desire.”

Yet when the nihilist “annihilates” then they annihilate everything. As a strategy, Aragorn! puts it like this:

"What does nihilism have to offer beyond a mere avocation of destruction? The nihilist position does not allow for the comforts of this world. Not only is God dead to a nihilist, but also everything that has taken God's place; idealism, consciousness, reason, progress, the masses, culture, etc. Without the comforts of this metaphysical 'place' a strategic nihilist is free to drift unfettered by the consequences of her actions. 'A nihilist is a person who does not bow down to any authority, who does not accept any principle on faith, however much that principle may be revered.'... Strategic nihilism allows for the possibility that there is no future. The possibility of radical social transformation then becomes unhinged from the utopian aspirations of its proponents. Their hope can clearly be shown to be disconnected from the social and material reality of both the society as-it-is and the potential society that-could-be... A strategic nihilist understands that an ethical revolution does not create an ethical society."

The nihilist, then, is not a reformist! The nihilist does not want "more of the same but with different faces". The nihilist wants to run towards the horrors that are staring us in the face but that most of us try to look away from (even if often also constantly scrolling through them on electronic devices). It is not a matter of morality or "doing the right thing". It is a matter of action. The nihilist, claims Aragorn!, is "free to make moves on a chessboard that no one else is playing on." Rather than playing along with power, you write your own rules. You have to face up to the proposition that "THERE IS NOT A LIBERATING VISION FOR HUMANITY." The nihilist is done with artificially comforting bedtime stories. "There is nothing to eat here but grey paste that keeps us alive. But what for?" Why not then realise that you have neither anything to win nor anything to lose? So what would a person, or a group of people, in that situation be capable of? What could you break just because you can? What could you REFUSE to participate in? What could you do, in your daily life, FOR ITS OWN SAKE? How close dare you get to the edge of the

gaping void that, paradoxically, is the only real place that you will find new meaning?
Would you play your part in ending history?

“For the transformation of society without a positive program.”

A second person whose work I want to interact with here is that person known as “Flower Bomb”, a name seemingly chosen on purpose to combine the imagery of flowers with that of bombs. From reading some of their work (often found in the *Warzone* distro or on *The Anarchist Library*) I intuit that this person is American, of colour, queer and possibly female – not that this necessarily matters. If that is wrong in some respect, I apologise for my assumptions. (That they are American, of colour and queer seems positively attested to. Their gender is more of a guess coming from the name they have chosen.) More to the point is that they openly write to a nihilist agenda and claim the word “nihilist” as one useful for what they write to and engage in, something they also imagine as “anarchy”. Here they make the anti-political point I would make myself – as in their essay “Anarchy: The Life and Joy of Insubordination”:

“When people ask ‘What is “anarchy”?’, my answer is rarely a reference to the popular philosophers of history who define it academically as an ‘ism’. My personal relationship to anarchy is one of constant exploration and discovery. For me, what differentiates anarchy from any other political idea is the anti-politics of its practice. As an anarchist, I have no inclination to recruit a mass of people to overthrow the establishment. I have no desire to construct persuasive programs encouraging the ‘worker’ to join a party, vote, fight for better wages - let alone remain as a wage-slave. All I have is an anarchist project of my own: the reclaiming of my life from wage-slavery and social control. It is a project of self-

preservation armed with hostility to all that attempts to categorize, confine, and control me."

The focus of Flower Bomb here, then, is a personal war against social systems which would aim to control them. I am certain they would encourage this for every other individual too but, regardless of whether others join in and fight for themselves or not, they are determined to do it for themselves anyway. An important component of this action for Flower Bomb is an analysis of the social and political situation based, as they see it, in the coercing of individual submission:

"Things we come to familiarize ourselves with like presidential elections, the police, banks, and wage-slavery are all social systems constructed to maintain order – an order maintained through coercion, disempowerment, and fear. Together these things make up the governmental establishment which occupies and applies ownership to geographical locations. The maintaining of this occupation relies heavily on an apparatus that monopolizes violent force, as well as the subjugation of any persons residing in these locations. The subjugation of a population of people wouldn't succeed without the normalized logic of submission and psychological warfare. In order to gain access to the monopolized resources needed to survive, the conquered population of people are forced to reproduce and maintain the establishment through wage-slavery: enslavement in exchange for a monetary wage. At the root of this social control is the domination of the individual – a domination which reinforces the logic of individual submission to the group."

Flower Bomb clearly sees power in the individual because they see that the systems of control which daily coerce us exist to break the will of the individual to resist or subvert them. If one person disobeys and gets away with it others may follow suit. Thus, we have

situations like one I read about yesterday where companies put fake job advertisements up in order to scare their employees into believing they are imminently replaceable. Elsewhere AI companies now advertise "AI employees" as new, more efficient workers. The fear of potential unemployment and destitution is brandished as a whip might have been in former times, an explicit and open psychological warfare of bosses against workers. Flower Bomb is then, besides being an anarchist and a nihilist, an anti-capitalist and anti-work (as I am too). They see capitalism and work as weapons wielded against the population at large, incarcerating sets of human relations. As a weapon deployed against this, they imagine not the mass revolt, the union, the collective action which has been used so often in the past and seems, in the long run if not in every individual case, to have only led us up to the current incarcerated moment, but "the power of uncontrollable, unpredictable, individual revolt."

Put simply in my own words: movements can be derailed very easily by taking out the leaders. Many are just sheep joining in anyway. But the individual who acts is motivated for themselves and far more committed as a result. They will act in their own interest and with much less possibility of being caught or stopped for they have told no one about it since there is no one to tell. Their strike is out of the blue. It comes from a desire for wildness and a feral wish to be free. Imagine if people just acted for themselves! No one could stop that. In fact, the bosses of capitalism and workerism are banking on you creating movements; they are much more easy to control and subvert than people just acting for themselves at random. We see it again and again. Such people thus fear INDEPENDENCE the most. What is being revolted against here is a daily practice coercive others in business and politics want to impose upon them or subject them to. Don't think that's true? Then explain why the current British Labour(!) government is trying to force

even officially sick and disabled people into work and threatening their benefits should they not comply. The workerist cancer is everywhere and it infects most:

"So many norms, roles, and identities shoved down our throats from birth - is it really a surprise that the oppressed 'workers of the world' haven't smashed capitalism to pieces by now? Where in the prison of society do we find the encouragement to not only be our unique wild selves, but to also weaponize our hostility towards the societal apparatus of control? Individuality, often promoted within the confinement of a pre-constructed identity – one assigned at birth and necessary for the functioning of capitalist society – is defined by society rather than the chaos of indefinite, ungoverned self-discovery. Due to the anthropocentric lens through which we view the world, wildness is moralized as an evil savagery in need of domesticating and management. Wildness is the enemy of the technological colonization of the natural world. So what does anarchist wildness look like? Anarchy as wildness refuses the control and domination of socially constructed systems which subjugate individuality. Wherever there are social constructs attempting to subjugate individual uniqueness, there is a politicized program at play. This program (which often attempts to acquire a dominating position) is responsible for normalizing a standardized way of life in which individual people are reduced from complex ever-changing beings to the identity of 'worker', or - for the sake of this essay - 'wage-slave'."

To this Flower Bomb contrasts the anarchist value of "becoming ungovernable" – but I wonder if many people understand what that really means or requires? It means taking responsibility for your own survival. It means destroying the leverage of others to enslave you. It means preferring a feral wildness to incarcerating technological existences. It means undoing the things that have turned many of us into useless beings with barely any skills of survival or independence at all. We have been turned into people utterly reliant

on others and that was by design, systematic. A person who cannot survive by themselves or even in a small group of like-minded others, and who is not independent, is much more prey to the coercions of capitalist dependency, is much more prey to being made a dependent. So, as Flower Bomb elucidates, we live in a world of dependency where groups of wage slaves provide the things that other groups of wage slaves need to survive. This is alienating and it is primarily alienating against one's own self-interest. It is done on purpose to make each human individual reliant on the capitalist, workerist system. If you refuse to take part in this that system intends to make you suffer, and even die, for it. As a warning to everyone else if nothing else. (Do you see now why I suggested that we live in "the Wasteland" of part two of this book for ourselves? There are plenty of Immortan Joes around here. There is even one who is orange.) So Flower Bomb's point is that it is not in the interests of capitalism or workerism to allow us to develop strong personalities for ourselves in which we identify strongly with our own interests. Consequently:

"As society forces us into schools to begin the indoctrination sequence of behavioural conformity and obedience, we have very little opportunity to learn about ourselves and our capabilities. Between school and our homes, playgrounds and neighbourhood streets, we're allowed a regulated time-frame of play. From my own perspective, play is the materialization of imaginative desire, exploration, and discovery. Each of these are fundamental tools necessary in observing and comprehending one's environment and their relationship to it. Embedded in that relationship is a 'self' that is composed of experiences and personal desires. But with such a narrow time-frame, a young individual only has a limited scope of exploration and instead, with development, begins internalizing the rhetoric of consumerist, productive, and responsible adulthood.

For real though - what can most people say about themselves and the lives they live? Aside from a few forms of escapism or maybe hobby activities that stem from personal desire, many peoples lives are just wage-slavery, paying bills, paying for materialist shit and wage-slave some more to stockpile (save) money. Shit, people spend most of their lives using the present to prepare or secure a future - the existence of a future which is often taken for granted in the first place. So how much can one know about their self when so much of the 'self' is being constricted, conditioned, and defined in terms of wage-slave productivity? Whether class or social, the status of an individual under capitalism is determined by their access to, and relationship with, materialism. But what about a 'self' unbound by capitalism, and insubordinate to materialist representation? Or a 'self' that refuses the traditional categorical assignments of social constructs and embraces life as anarchistic existence? A life of illegalist anarchy then allows for the limitless possibilities of creating one's self day by day."

"Know thyself" is ancient wisdom enshrined in both Greek and Roman history. But today it has been negated by a capitalism and authoritarianism which wants you to over-write yourself with corporate propaganda. Today the mantra is that you should not know yourself, you should "know your place" according to what Flower Bomb calls a "logic of submission". In reply to this they say: "The logic of submission is only negated through a fearless self-confidence and the desire to become socially ungovernable." This becomes what they refer to as a "survival without permission":

"Anarchy can not be experienced through history books, the reformation of work places nor the confines of a new societal system. Anarchy breathes with the rhythm of the wild in constant flux, ungoverned by anthropocentric laws and order. I rejoice in my anarchy in the transformative abandonment of the role and identity of 'the proletariat'. There is no great

future revolution on the horizon to organize or wait for. There is only today, with no guarantee of tomorrow. There are no charismatic leaders to open the door to freedom. There is only the power of anarchist individuality defined by the liberating ammunition of desire."

Here we see that Flower Bomb finds neither solace nor joy in being made a member of a group – in a world that insists that only collective things matter and only collective denominations really count. It is the same when, in another essay, they interact with the "gender nihilism" of Alyson Escalante (and others) in "Arming Negativity: Towards the Queerest Attack". Here they are interacting with the essay "Gender Nihilism: An Anti-Manifesto" and its follow up "Beyond Negativity: What Comes After Gender Nihilism?" which together recommend "communist politics" and collective action based on "affinities and similarities" as solutions to the reality of gendered violence. But Flower Bomb responds:

"From my own individualist perspective, nihilism is so much more than just pessimism, negation and violence; it is the personification of anarchy, the reclaiming of individuality and the embracing of ungovernable uniqueness. Queer negativity is hostility towards socially constructed expectations, and those who enforce them, and is subsequently the emancipation of one's undefinable 'self' from gender conformity. This includes the expropriation of violence and the total abandonment of victimhood. Queer nihilism materializes itself as a declaration of war on society. For every possibility of sexual assault there is a blade being sharpened for self-defense. Dangerous spaces are personified, replacing the positive politics of safety. Armed queers don't just make waves; they are tsunamis against the logic of submission... My queerness is an experimentation that never ends. It is the totality of a life lived against the law, insubordinate and wild. It is not a

communist politics but a nihilist negation to all systems that attempt to subordinate individuality. It is not the leftist politics of demanding and building a better world but an anarchist insurgency of reclaiming life day to day, and setting fire to its captors. Since gender is embedded in every fabric of this industrial, civilized society, I find no hope in salvaging any part of it—only joy in every second of its calculated demise."

Flower Bomb makes fairly clear here that the logic of their queer nihilism is attack and that the enemy is "industrialised, civilised society" in any form it would take up, either current or reformed, capitalist or communist, conservative or "leftist". This is a queerness that, as they make plain later, "is not a positive project" (so it is not about creating a collective body of queers, for example) but is rather expressed as follows:

"Queer is confrontation: my desire for freedom has intercourse with my hatred for civilization. What blooms is a lifelong dance that materializes the queerest attack on capital and social control. I find myself immersed in the chaos of bloodied weapons, broken glass and shrieking alarms. My body is a dangerous space of love and rage ungoverned by the morality of non-violence. With love, and in solidarity with the wild, and with all those who embrace queer anarchy with hysterical laughs of joy - towards the queerest attack upon the civilized order!"

Here the solidarity is with "the wild" and the enemy is not an ideology or a society but "the civilised order" itself. This seems to be because, as Flower Bomb puts this in the short piece "Why Nihilism?", a response to John Zerzan's book "Why Hope?", in their nihilism, they are against "compulsory servitude to sociopolitical systems". They make the case for those who "discover freedom in the total abandonment of positive politics including the 'utopian future' tied to it like a carrot." Flower Bomb makes the point in this piece that

the “nihilist” Zerzan refers to in “Why Hope?” is a generic category, a “stereotype”, rather than a “unique individual”. But such a thing is a phantom, it doesn’t exist. Only actual people exist and each is unique in its particular combination of needs and desires. And so, in some respects, what Flower Bomb actually wants is “freedom from hope”, freedom *from* being tied to a kind of future. Thus, we get the piece “No Hope, No Future: Let the Adventures Begin!” where Flower Bomb asserts that:

“The Future is a god obeyed at the expense of one’s immediate desires in order to secure distant membership in a non-existent utopia. The Future is a hologram projection of dreams and promises that get rejected by the present. For politicians and other authoritarians seeking long-term domination, The Future is often socially utilized to exploit one’s fear of living in the moment. The Future domesticates wild desire, limiting its capacity to explore spontaneous, unpredictable experiences.”

“The Future”, in other words, like “hope” or “work”, gets used as a device of intellectual and imaginal control upon the feral, wild and self-organising individual. This is even the case in regard to “The Left” or “progressives” or “socialists” who, as Flower Bomb points out here, “enjoy long-winded academic debates and discussions, attempting to redefine revolution within the limited scope of civilized society.” This points up a terminal and major difference between the nihilist anarchist and more social types of anarchist for the nihilist anarchist is NOT trying to save or reform now – or any conceivable reconfiguration of now: they are trying to destroy it, annihilate it, make it forever impossible as both a reality and as a system of relationships. One of Flower Bomb’s criticisms of social anarchism here, in fact, is that such people as belong to it seem to spend more time imagining future utopias that will never exist than “attacking the existing prison society now”. Your “solarpunks” and your “social anarchists” are excellent dreamers – but what

good is that if all you ever do is dream? You have effectively removed yourself from the field of battle, you have given in and conceded defeat without a single blow for your own interest. You are useless and pointless against the very people and systems that oppress, coerce and kill. All you can do is imagine and reimagine unrealistic and unrealisable futures that will never come to pass in acts of narcissistic and self-distracted impotence. You are fantasists who have abandoned yourselves to your fantasies.

As an alternative to this, Flower Bomb offers 'wild experimentation' and 'illegalist adventure'. They embrace the animalistic descriptor 'feral'. About such terms they say:

"When I speak of 'wildness' I am referring to the unique complexities of individual experiences and emotion, which defy the politicized confinement of analytical measurement. When I speak of 'illegalist adventure' I am referring to the full-flowering of individual growth and self-liberation beyond the confines of law and order.

My wildness is defined by an individualism borne of the intercourse of anarchy and nihilism; it can not be captured and confined to socially constructed identities nor the poverty of leftist ideology. The illegality of my feral revolt against industrial civilization makes me an accomplice of all wild beings who viciously reject social domestication. My wildness is an exploration into the adventurous unknown life experiences of criminal, anti-workerist anarchy. My experiences are unique, ever-changing and my own, blowing to pieces the assumption that they can be defined by identity-based affiliations with any particular group membership. I find identity politics laughable, rejecting its glorified victimhood and representation. Rather than participating in the pretentious role of identity policing, I take destructive aim at the mental prisons of my own class, race and gender assignment."

A key stance here is that of “insubordination” and it is evident all throughout Flower Bomb’s writing. It can be conceived of as a deliberate and determined will to disobey all authorities that set themselves up over human beings and the world. It is a further aspect of their nihilism which, in this essay, is not about creating “a blue print for another world” nor “attempting to make leftism palatable to the masses”. They insist here, in a Trump era of open fascism in which “the masses” *still* do not resist, that:

“In the transformation of civil anarchism to feral insurgency, anarchy becomes an anti-political life of illegalism accessible to any individual with the courage to get wild and fuck shit up.”

Here, however, the nihilist anarchist risks becoming the target of “friendly fire” (I have spoken about this before in other books and the spectre of one kind of anarchist calling the cops on another is a real one that actually, if inexplicably, occurs) since the socialist anarchist or arrogant Leftist more generally often imagines themselves some kind of policeman or accountability officer. Flower Bomb makes mention of this when they refer to “The authoritarian ‘revolutionaries’ who carry communist bibles filled with ‘better futures’.” But these do not always come across as voluntarist futures and neither is it to be imagined that you will have much say in their dogmas. So Flower Bomb adds that they “are a predatory bunch, discouraging individualist self-determination and targeting those most vulnerable to groupthink buzzwords like ‘hope’ and ‘community’.” For what its worth, I agree with Flower Bomb here that we should have no time for those who want to take charge of the present for the sake of an imaginary, and collective, future that is no more about real self-determination than now is. Any present or future based on submission is to be rejected whatever face or branding it wears. We should also refuse

the phantom of the future for the destructive creativity of present reality and the enjoyment that can be had in the now. So, as Flower Bomb then says:

"The way I see it, no one other than my self is more qualified to determine and acquire my freedom. I am responsible for my own life, freedom and the necessary attack in obtaining both. Without prioritizing this personal responsibility, I would fall into a dependency which would enable an authoritarian, social hierarchy that normalizes my own disempowerment."

This materialises as "individualist attack" but it doesn't singularly imply a permanent cohort of one. Each has their own life and desires but one doesn't deny that others equally exist with whom one can act, either spontaneously or with more determination and organisation. (Example: those in the War Rig at the conclusion to *Mad Max: Fury Road*, a diverse collection of differing interests.) Flower Bomb's point is that this be individually and personally actualised:

"With individualist attack, the actor is not alienated from the action. Everything is evaluated directly, personally, and in the moment. The attack then becomes a direct expression of the individual. Without the ideological guidance of a future utopia or greater power, nor the motivation of a collectivized identity, the individual becomes simultaneously the catalyst and creator of their anarchy."

Thus, one can actualise the reality that one thinks and acts for and from oneself whilst also taking part in actions with effects beyond oneself. In this, both are just as important as the other for the nihilist anarchist mentality and exist as a standing challenge to "groupthink" and the mentality of authorities and leaders who organise and command

those who obey. It is, in fact, part of the strategy for destroying the present world in its organisational relationships and the sheep-like behaviour that blights it. Thus:

"Socially speaking, personal uniqueness is more often feared than accepted. If it can't be controlled, massified, or out-right eliminated it is a threat to the continuity of an established social identity. The breaking down of control and stability often induces panic in authority. An individualism that rejects the logic of submission becomes boundless in the exploration of personal potential. This ungovernable potential threatens the collectivized security of social control and predictability. Similar to the strategy of spontaneous attack, desire armed with chaos is like the wildness that civilization tries to domesticate; determined and resilient... I have no desire to propose and enforce a pre-constructed model of living upon people from afar. As I expect for myself here and now, anyone who exists beyond my own life is entitled to the same individual agency."

Thus, as Flower Bomb points out in "On Self-Love and Gun Powder", "nihilism is the rejection of all that which is positioned above the individual", anything that would presume to fulfill the role "external authority".

At the end of 2023 Flower Bomb announced their retirement from public writing. Evidently, they found something better to do with their time. I hope they have had a vibrant 2024 and beyond. But they had one last essay to deliver: "A Feral Life: One Last Nihilist Exposition". In it, they produced a wide-ranging attack on the status quo and a restatement of why nihilistic anarchy was best all round. A key part of this, as for me as you can see in this book, is a focus on "morality", "imagination and independent thought" as delimiting what the human being finds acceptable. Nature itself (i.e. anarchy) has no imaginal or philosophical barriers. What can be done, can be done. In addition, it can be

contextually evaluated such that what “is appropriate” here might not always be (and *vice versa*). Human society, however, is often very different. Situations become moralist, authoritarian. Yet, as Flower Bomb points out: “Only through coercive enforcement can moralist values be maintained, and even then, anarchy still takes place.” Human moralism and authoritarian behaviour manipulation is an artificial bubble set in a sea of anarchy. Flower Bomb points out that “the primary function of morality is conformity through mental governance” but, of course, the self-actualising nihilist anarchist who acts without a cause cannot tolerate that. There can be no “conformity” in anarchy. And so here Flower Bomb preaches the nihilist gospel of self-determination and autonomy once more:

“from my own personal experience, there is nothing quite like the lawless pandemonium of hundreds - or even thousands - of people who have actively decided to become ungovernable, even if only for a few nights, and even if for reasons that are not at all congruent. These ruptures of disorder have throughout history highlighted the limitations of police and military power, as well as examples of instinctual mutual aid which can blossom between strangers.”

You see, Flower Bomb is keen to point out that acting in independence, disobedience and destructivity WORKS. It exposes the fallacy of an authoritarian total power. Power is never total. Authority is never absolute. The cops can be defied, the government can be ignored or avoided. You can commit crime and get away with it. You can flip the bird to your boss or your landlord. And maybe if you did all of these things more often then they wouldn't have the power over you that they do have. Flower Bomb's nihilism is, in fact, yet another reminder that direct action on your own behalf, allied with your studied and determined refusal of multiple forms of servitude, has both effects and a counter-power of its own. This applies not least of all in the imaginal realm where refusing the idea that

you are members of various classes but are, in fact, a concrete singularity with your own beliefs, desires and needs, is an intellectual and imaginal basis from which to plot freedom. You have your own will and you are fully justified in acting according to it in the face of corporate, social or political coercions. Acting for yourself is not merely “selfish” but, if enough people do it (although regardless of if they do it or not), would be an uncontrollable impulse to social freedoms more widely conceived. The nihilist, as Flower Bomb amply exhibits in their writing, wants to eradicate all social institutions which seek to control the individual or discourage their individuality. We are not merely members of monolithically constructed social classes, whether man and woman or gay and straight or black and white, we are people in our own right with our own wills. You do not exist for “the Movement” or “the Cause”. You exist, first and foremost, for yourself. All these social constructions that lie around us are inventions in a world of “open nothingness”. And that nothingness is our invitation to a wild freedom of self-responsibility rather than incarcerated collectivity. Your choice is to accept your domestication or to become feral.

Consequently:

“The common denominator shared between leftism, right wing politics, and industrial society as a whole is the presentation of a universalizing vision of life intended to be uncritically consumed by all... assuming all people want the same thing.”

But the nihilist does not assume this or accept the “universalising vision” which can only be conceived of by them as an attempt to enchant and coerce them with totalising visions. Instead, as a nihilist anarchist, in Flower Bomb’s understanding of this:

"In pursuit of one's freedom from all categorical roles and identities, and all philosophical and ideological guidance, one becomes the ungovernable creator of their destiny - but also an enemy to those who are determined to continue governing the lives of others."

This is the nihilist choice: domesticity and control somebody else subjects you to or the feral independence of a self-organising life without a cause.

B) TAZ/TIZ

"Since absolutely nothing can be predicated with any real certainty as to the 'true nature of things', all projects (as Nietzsche says) can only be 'founded on nothing.' And yet there must be a project - if only because we ourselves resist being categorized as 'nothing.' Out of nothing we will make something: the Uprising, the revolt against everything which proclaims: 'The Nature of Things is such-&-such.' We disagree, we are unnatural, we are less than nothing in the eyes of the Law – Divine Law, Natural Law, or Social Law - take your pick. Out of nothing we will imagine our values, and by this act of invention we shall live..."

Anarchists have been claiming for years that 'anarchy is not chaos.' Even anarchism seems to want a natural law, an inner and innate morality in matter, an entelechy or purpose-of-being. (No better than Christians in this respect, or so Nietzsche believed - radical only in the depth of their resentment.) Anarchism says that 'the state should be abolished' only to institute a new more radical form of order in its place. Ontological Anarchy however replies that no 'state' can 'exist' in chaos, that all ontological claims are spurious except the claim of chaos (which however is undetermined), and therefore that governance of any sort is impossible. 'Chaos never died.' Any form of 'order' which we have not imagined and

produced directly and spontaneously in sheer 'existential freedom' for our own celebratory purposes - is an illusion.

Of course, illusions can kill. Images of punishment haunt the sleep of Order. Ontological Anarchy proposes that we wake up, and create our own day - even in the shadow of the State, that pustulant giant who sleeps, and whose dreams of Order metastatize as spasms of spectacular violence.

The only force significant enough to facilitate our act of creation seems to be desire, or as Charles Fourier called it, 'Passion.' Just as Chaos and Eros (along with Earth and Old Night) are Hesiod's first deities, so too no human endeavor occurs outside their cosmogeneous circle of attraction.

The logic of Passion leads to the conclusion that all 'states' are impossible, all 'orders' illusory, except those of desire. No being, only becoming - hence the only viable government is that of love, or 'attraction.' Civilization merely hides from itself - behind a thin static scrim of rationality - the truth that only desire creates values. And so the values of Civilization are based on the denial of desire." (Hakim Bey – Immediatism)

In chapter 11 of my book *Black Dog* I discussed some of the work of the autodidact Peter Lamborn Wilson, otherwise known by the pseudonym Hakim Bey. Most famously, this includes his ongoing ruminations about his idea the "Temporary Autonomous Zone" (or TAZ), both a way of thinking about anarchy and also a way of thinking about how that anarchy might be experienced in real life through a series of occasions in which "pop-up anarchy" actually occurs in reality. The booklet first proclaiming this idea was published as far back as the mid 1980s, 40 years ago now, but its influence has been consistent ever

since then, especially in the America in which it was birthed. When I wrote about TAZ in *Black Dog* I did not say that much about it. I was happy to provide rather random commentary to what is actually mostly just a book of ideas and examples (and sometimes just words or phrases) almost entirely devoid of theory. (How you make the idea of the TAZ work for you, we may intuit, is very much up to you. Which is exactly as it should be.) But, actually, there are things to say about it more generally and one of these things is that it evinces a preference for ANARCHY (in Bey's own terms "Ontological Anarchy") over ANARCHISM, the latter being an -ism and so prey to rules, dogmas, partisanships, shibboleths, etc., which we have in fact seen throughout the history of anarchism (in its various factions, socialist, syndicalist or individualist, for example) and still see, to some extent, today. Hakim Bey, however, finds much more of substance in the idea of anarchy than he does in the idea of anarchism. And I think he is right about that. "Anarchy" is simply a description of a situation, an imaginative exploration of that situation, where "anarchism" will grow old and become out of date because it is a set and definable structure that reality will move around. Think of anarchism as a "one size fits all" tee shirt whereas anarchy is simply where you are, where you can't help being.

So in this book, and not least due to the writing of Hakim Bey, I am moving away from anarchism and very much preferring anarchy. Anarchism, it is quite easy to see, is very prey to becoming "THE CAUSE" but I have already stated that "anarchy without a cause" is very much where we find ourselves. We are anarchists of nowhere. That is, anarchists of now here. This is the salient fact of our situation, all of us together, whether "anarchist" or not. Anarchy is something that we are part of and, all around us, narratives have been constructed to tell us that it is this or that and that, consequently, we should act or organise in this way or that. But in a situation of anarchy stock answers will not necessarily be the best and if we are to properly honour the notions of agency, autonomy

and free association which constitute the idea of anarchy itself (anarchy = self-organisation) then we need the freedom to act as we will (as people in uncivilised times and places actually had – leading to a vast diversity of really existing human communities). With this in mind, it is worth reacquainting ourselves with the TAZ once again – and then delving further into other writing by Hakim Bey in order to pull yet further threads from his work.

It is worth pointing out before I do this, however, that I see the TAZ as a very good example of what I am calling the TIZ. “What’s a TIZ?” I’m glad you asked. The TIZ is a TOTAL IMAGINATIVE ZONE and you can conceive of this (or, at least, I have conceived of it) in multiple ways. You could just think of it as the universe and so of the universe as a place of imagination. You could think of it as the activity of groups of people who want to imagine things (and, implicitly, imagine them other or differently) and that’s certainly one way I want to articulate the idea here. It is in this sense that a TAZ is a TIZ. But you could also apply TIZ personally and, if you do, you perhaps end up with things like this book, a work of imagination. A TIZ is a place of imagination where things may be willed or desired such as you can imagine them. They are places where mental shackles can be cast off and the imagination can be utilised to create new things, new relationships, new realities, new ways of understanding and existing. So my point here is that them being imagined can make them real, can change reality, can create new realities – and the experience of these realities. As we go on in this chapter, this will become more apparent.

But let’s begin back with the TAZ. First of note is that this idea comes with a descriptive sub-heading attached: “Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism”. These are suggestive phrases and they don’t have dogmas associated with them which over-determine their meaning. What do *you* think they mean? In immediately talking about “chaos” Hakim Bey

wants you to imagine that nothing is fixed and everything is real – including whatever you can imagine. There is a void, an arena of (imaginative) freedom, and it is populated by illusions that others, and perhaps even you yourself, will want to believe are fixed and unchanging realities. But these “realities” – civilisation, morality – are illusions. All you need do is imagine them away. (Murray Bookchin would not have liked such talk. He would tell you that civilisation has some big, sharp sticks which it regularly prods real people with. And he would be right. But he is missing the point.) To imagine them away is to see through them and to see them for what they are – acts of imagination which human beings have recreated by physical force. If we imagine differently and so act differently things will then be different – for they need not be anything in particular at all. They are only what we can imagine and so instantiate. “Poetic terrorism” is then a name for the thought and action aimed at CHANGE. Poetic terrorism is throwing the rock into the lake that breaks the spell of its stillness and seeming eternity. Poetic terrorism is an impetus to transmutation, a protest against all those who want things to stand still. It is not the nature of the universe that anything stand still (as I shall come to addressing in the next section) but there are those who try to set things in amber, if only for a little while and usually to their advantage. These people are your enemy. Deploy the poetic terrorism.

This is a change of attitude as much as anything else for “attitude” is having fixed beliefs which set the world on a foundation. However, in anarchy we must also value the unintentional, the accident, the spontaneous. We must disobey customs, disdain traditions and break taboos. Not because we are contrarian but because we can when we want to and because we want to remind ourselves *they are* only illusions. The thing about playing along is that you must not play along all the time – with anything, including “not playing along”. There are no rules. Including the rule that there are no rules. The

liberation of others depends on the liberation of ourselves for liberation, like slavery, is catching. If you would be greatly loved then love greatly. You have nothing to lose anyway. Live life as play. Aim for wildness. Live in a wilderness. Freedom of mind begets freedom of action. This breaks down all rules. Here is where Hakim Bey talks about "the personal mythscape". But it is only a phrase in TAZ. I think of it as stumbling upon the TIZ. As I wrote previously, this: *"speaks to me of a life constructed and made as one walks it, connecting this to that and that to something else, etc., as one goes. In this process one creates a territory of meaning and value into which all else fits. It becomes the context of everything with which you have to do. This is interesting because it obviously gets richer and more complex the more you walk and that suggests a broad and extensive journey for, the more you experience, the broader your territory will be – just as when a walker explores a territory extensively and comes to know the terrain all the better thereafter because of that fact. Life is stories and stories are connections made on a terrain of meaning and value. A personal mythscape."*

In the context of the TOTAL IMAGINATIVE ZONE we can think about this further though. We can see the personal mythscape as something helpful and useful to us. (And not just to us.) We can see it as that thing which primarily gives meaning to our lives. The world is what we think it is. Our lives are what we think they are. Our relationships are as we imagine them. I mean this literally, actually, in/as experience. I mean our thoughts construct how we think about these things which is a process constitutive of them. They construct these things as you then confront, handle and manipulate them or relate to them by means of imaginary calculus. They are ideas, imaginative ideas. They exist in the realm of the imagination (even if they also refer to things imagined not simply in such a realm). From this perspective, the personal mythscape could be said to be the most important thing about you because it is exactly the thing which gives anything meaning or

value or relates one thing to any other thing, thus creating every relationship you can imagine and so creating you. If you believe something, it is because such a belief finds a place and purpose in the personal mythscape. This personal mythscape is everything you actually amount to bar several kilos of animated flesh and bone and blood. It's what makes you you.

Hakim Bey, in highlighting this, then really suggests that this mythscape is your armoury for waging your war of change against illusion. It is a war for awareness fought against the illusions of others (but also potentially yourself) in vocabulary very open to magical understanding. "Conjuring" and "enchantment" fits very well within it and sheds some light in doing so. But what is an "illusion"? If you push this to its limits its any idea by which you attempt to fix reality or any rule you say it can't break. How can any reality that includes imagination have rules or be fixed by means of them? Personally, this means I question the very idea of "knowledge" as fixed facts and the entire need for something called "epistemology", the imagined philosophy of knowing and how we come to know. I view that subject as entirely begging the question, a case of exactly "illusion". (Don't blame me. Nietzsche and Rorty – and Zhuangzi – made me do it.) Do we know anything? How would we know that we know? You get the idea. What is going on here is the practice of CHANGING CONSCIOUSNESS, something also evident in my anarchist quotes in the early part of this chapter. It is our task to change consciousness, to challenge how people conceive of and imagine things, always showing that they can be seen another way. Being so seen, the conclusion to draw is that reality is none of the singular things we can imagine it to be. It could be other. It could be diverse. And then it would mean something other than what it now seems to mean. We have changed the world. So when you see the symbols of empire, deface them. The empire is an illusion and its symbols are there to make it seem more material, and more fixed and permanent, than it actually is. It

is actually only a few acts of imagination away from ceasing to exist completely – in people’s imaginations and valuations if nowhere else. We are about what Hakim Bey calls aesthetic or spiritual jihad. And it is constitutive of our being.

This is “terrorism” because it refuses to allow those with power to settle into their imaginative illusions. It tells people that the realities they imagine ARE illusions. It inscribes poems of defiance and refusal across material and imaginative realities. It causes offence to dominating ideas (and often to those who push or insist on them). It outrages with ideas that revel in their freedom outside the incarcerating borders of civilised thought. It despises morality, especially sexual morality which chains up the body in order to put it under control. Poetic terrorism is sexual, lewd, lascivious, unafraid of the body and unashamed by its display. It does not imprison desire with chains labelled morality or custom or legality or reason. It acts outside the law and glories in crime. It has no dogma of behaviour and no interest in drawing up codes of dos and don’ts. It does not believe that one human being can tell another human being what to do or order them in any sense whatsoever. It sees through “law” and “crime” as pure invention and yet more illusions. The conclusion to this is that we must act as if we are already free – for we *are* already free in an imaginative sense. And that imaginative sense is to be encouraged by being further imagined, both singly and in communion with others. We do this to learn to act on desire and at will, to act against all formations or organisations of society that would imagine to control us. WE ARE FREE SPIRITS.

So it is not about waiting for anything. The start line was when you were born. The finish line is when you die. There is nothing to wait for in between. You don’t wait for “the revolution”. The revolution is you – or it is nothing. Your task is to imagine bands of trespassing associates, a feral horde, a glorious multitude who can share their love of

imaginative freedom together, who trample down the world as others try to enforce it upon them. These plunder, pillage and refuse the world's enforced order at will and in association as they can and as they may. They steal moments of freedom from their imagined incarceration and the captors who seek to enforce it. They imagine the prison doors flung open and the bars on the windows removed. They live as if they are. They offend the jailers by the ways in which they can imagine and experience freedom. They taunt them with ideas of liberty. They understand that anyone who would be offended by liberty is themselves a captive and imprisoned. But they realise that oh so many are and that, at least in the West, and those other places that have been infected by its malign and authoritarian ideas, copthink runs through it from top to bottom. There are police everywhere and most everyone you will meet is at least infected with the idea of police. Ontological anarchy and poetic terrorism is death to the idea of police. You cannot be free whilst you can imagine the agents of coercion. You must imagine coercion away. You must realise it is just a particularly offensive illusion. We do not seek to live in incarcerating narratives but in ones that are always open to change. We are agents of creation not agents of coercion. Our mentality is materially and imaginatively sexual. (Pro-creation.)

Earlier I called this war but Hakim Bey is right in TAZ to correct this and point out that it is INSURRECTION, an INSURGENCY of changed values. It is not "class war" but the rising up of the eternally rebellious. It is "unconquerable desire" and "mad love". It is not an act of salvation which "saves us from ourselves" but a refusal of such salvations. It is a recourse to our own imaginations and our own wills set free from saviours. It is an escape from the tunnel vision of utopias for Utopia is (literally and semantically) NOWHERE. This means that all utopias – corporate, commercial, capitalist, liberal, communist, anarchist – come to NOTHING. And they must come to nothing for everything adds up to nothing. There is

no permanent, eternal city of God, Jerusalem or Mecca, to find. There are just a thousand upon a thousand flowers blooming as they may, the results of black seeds. The glory (and the occult secret) of anarchy is in the creation of illimitable diversity. Thus, anarchy abhors a fascist. If people need to open their minds up to anything, it is difference and its utter legitimacy and necessity. This is a biological truism if nothing else.

This once again reminds us that “Everything belongs to the sphere of personal/imaginal morality”; there are no general laws. So re-imagine the value of pleasure (especially including sexual pleasure) and remember its social worth and uses. Undo the enchantment, in which we have been trapped, of the commodification of desire (which is the imprisonment of pleasure with ideological chains) and the economic control of desire. Pleasure must be re-imagined along uneconomic and anti-economic lines. (Death to Only Fans!) Our pleasures and desires are not for their economic exploitation or to entice and exploit others. Pleasure and desire are not commodities and life is not a vehicle created for economic profit or the acquiring of resources. “Capitalism”, the utilisation of things as “resources” for the purpose of private enrichment, is an anti-social imaginative trap which imprisons you in a spiral of constant acquisition and constant exploitation. It ossifies relationships for such purposes. It is anti-creative and anti-change. It simply wants to turn your life into a slavery to things rather than a freedom of relationships. For capitalism to work the relationships must be fixed and minutely controlled. This is why capitalism also hates any true or real diversity in or of relating, a thing which the poetic terrorist thinks of as life.

Hakim Bey, in TAZ, seems to imagine that anarchism, in its 19th century classic guise, has failed. Of course, it was always doomed to if it was perceived as a movement or a cause rather than as “a vital, daring conspiracy of self-liberation”. It was never (read: should

never have been) about a monolithic movement that claimed “rights” and that wanted to institute (literally, in institutions) dogmas of behaviour or association or organisation. Even the anarchist communist, Errico Malatesta, said that he did not want to emancipate the people, he wanted the people to emancipate themselves. And this should always be the point: anarchism is not about how other people emancipate everyone all together. It is about how people emancipate THEMSELVES. If you don’t act for yourself then YOU WILL NEVER BE EMANCIPATED. Simple as that. It is fortunate, then, that the imaginative act, and the imaginative tools, necessary to begin and take this journey are always there, available whenever you want to begin. It is not about a movement unless that movement is yours away from imprisonment and towards your own personal liberty. In making that move I have no doubt that, sooner or later, you will find others daring to take the same journey. And you can join up with them, or not, as your desire or other appropriate reasons make it seem good to you.

But if you cannot, and you do not, imagine yourself free – for yourself – then how will you ever even start off down that road? The insurrection of imagination begins in your head – and there is nowhere else that it could ever begin. It is nothing to do with narratives of “the right way to do things” or with “movements”. There is no right way. There is the way you imagine. There is plotting and conspiring. There is rebelling and refusing. There is no map that can be drawn of your autonomy and no map that can lay out your desires for you in their relations to those of others. There is, says Hakim Bey, simply the chaos principle where chaos is continual creation. Where you can create and play (but never “work”) then there is anarchy. Here our only ethics will be our own (an always personal responsibility) and we re-imagine general morality out of existence. A self-organisation of thinking which is a revolutionary re-imagining. The self-responsibility of desire. So

anarchism is dead: long live anarchy! We seek to overcome ourselves. We will have to find friends, colleagues and associates, if we can, along the way.

In TAZ Hakim Bey has not yet even got to the part where he openly discusses the TAZ but he does so now. He begins with “Pirate Utopias” (also the title of one of his books) which he describes as an “information network” of pirate relationships. This is an interesting way to put it. Life, we may muse, is its relationships – who you know, how you know them, on what basis the relationships are conducted. By describing the pirates as a matter of the “network” they created, Bey refuses to narrow it down simply to the several “intentional communities” they formed, either on land or at sea. Pirates, of course, as I have myself discussed at length elsewhere – taking them as archetypal for anarchy – demonstrate how one can live beyond states and laws according to your own social and political ethics. Pirates are self-organising and not organised. Pirates acted always for and from themselves. No one was going to do anything for them. They even provided, to some degree, for those who suffered as a result of their choices with shares of booty going to those injured who could no longer pirate due to the obvious pitfalls (such as losing an arm, a leg or an eye) of the job. Pirates are examples of those who have re-imagined their lives entirely outside of the State, outside of customary morality and outside of its provision by others. They are those who have re-imagined life as a matter of their agency, autonomy and free association. They are a living and breathing example of the Temporary Autonomous Zone that exists within a Total Imaginative Zone where reality itself can be reimagined. Thus, it was reimagined without country, within a family of shared, always voluntary, brotherhood in a life arbitrated by means of uncoerced contractual agreement (pirate articles). No one could force you to be a pirate and you could (mostly) walk away from it anytime you liked. Piracy was, and is, the reimagination of life.

Hakim Bey makes the point in TAZ that he does not strictly define (or perhaps even define at all) what a TAZ is. He does not wish to be dogmatic about it. This is wise. He also makes the point that, should you get it, it should be “almost self-explanatory”. In light of the pirate example, I would agree. Motivated, imaginative motherfuckers should be able to get the gist and create to taste or opportunity. It is something for which you need the desire and the imagination but, if you have them, then it should be no problem. Pirates were pirates because they wanted to be pirates and, wanting to be pirates, they made piracy work when and as they could. They were not trying to join in with the world but to simply go off on flights of their own fancy. They found themselves (often due to the cruelty of a world which had stolen them, taken them to sea and regarded them as “human resources”) open to new imaginative possibilities. Here language helps explain for this is an *insurgency*, a rising up, a raising up of oneself. It is, as Bey notes, “a bootstrap operation”. The State is history (history is normally the history of states) and piracy is the forbidden insurrection against both history and states. It is the imaginative or re-imaginative moment which steps outside the bounds of history and states. But it is also anti-history and anti-state – for it has no desire, imaginative or otherwise, to step back inside them. So here we can see that as an act of imagination it is a thinking otherwise, a valuing differently, a new meaning of life, a creation of diverse relationships: a new consciousness. We might even say it is a magical act, an act which breaks the civilisational spell or enchantment by conjuring new life. It is the festival, the party, the Dionysia, the constitution of non-ordinary, or non-ordered, existence – for however long it may exist. It is the changed consciousness, an intoxication.

Here Hakim Bey addresses the criticism that this would seem somewhat of a downgrade from former anarchist utopias which dreamed of political and economic world freedom from capitalism and states. Sad to say, he at least partly capitulates in the face of this

criticism. But, in doing so, he points out that such utopias have not, as yet, come anywhere close to materialising and, indeed, seem pretty much impossible to actually imagine actually existing. If anarchy is this then it is an extremely tough imaginal ask. (Of course, you can always imagine places where a somewhat “pure” anarchy is so – as Ursula K. Le Guin did in *The Dispossessed* – but if the point is to act on the imagination in order to make it material then that’s somewhat more difficult. The imagination risks slipping into pure fantasy, something that was never supposed to be material nor needs to be in order to satisfy the fantasy. You can then find yourself essentially fantasising rather than imagining new ways to affect material reality.)

Here Bey changes tack on us somewhat. The point of the TAZ, he says, is neither to be an end in itself nor to replace all other forms of organisation, tactics or goals. The TAZ, put more bluntly, is not meant to last forever, or become a permanent state or settlement. It is not being put forward, dogmatically, as what anarchy is *really* supposed to be about. It is, instead, “a guerrilla operation”, a liberation “of land, of time, of imagination” which disappears as quickly as it came to be and which, as potential, pops up again somewhere else (perhaps in a different form) as and when it can. It is possible that a TAZ could be so small or unnoticed that it either stays around for years or keeps regularly reoccurring in the same form over a period - but this is not the point of it. It is about rising up in an authentic act of insurgency and insurrection according to a feral consciousness. A TAZ (not least as an example, as I would suggest, of the TIZ) is an insubstantial emanation of pure freedom in and through the void. It is the idea which, as V reminds is, is bulletproof. A TAZ is the physical realisation of some activity or presence which gives materiality to the idea of wild liberty which can never be killed – for there is literally nothing to kill.

I break off from Hakim Bey for a moment to consider some examples provided by Paul Z. Simons in *Modern Slavery*, a journal he wrote for over many years in and amongst his life of authentic illegality. In “Pure Black: An Emerging Consensus Among Some Comrades?” Simons attempts to outline some possible markers of an evident “black” anarchy (as opposed to red, socialistic anarchy) which might not seem out of place in some liberal and academic terrorism journal. This anarchy, according to Simons, is marked by:

1. an acceptance of sometimes violent tactics such as attacking the forces of law and order, anonymous burnings and random destruction (as opposed to the devotees of supposed non-violent protest who insist non-violence is absolutely necessary for any form of success),
2. a notable individualism (not least for operational reasons. The cell of one doesn’t need to do silly and dangerous things like communicating with others [who might be informers or plants]),
3. a nihilist “acting without a cause” which regards “success” (whatever that is) as irrelevant,
4. a rejection of any compromise or cooperation with the forces of authority, capital or property – denoted by the normies as simple “normality” (actions imagined here range from squatting, occupations and meter-fixing to outright robbery, burglary and theft but may also include refusal of any and all communication or interaction with governments, including for the purposes of taxes, benefits, passports or even health services),
5. an attitudinal refusal of “formal organisation” because of an actual fear of what it instantiates (organisations tainted with “the ideas and characteristics of the dominant society”).

Simons, who lived an unorthodox life of wandering illegalism around the world himself, claims that these examples are not conjectures but actual things he has seen amongst actual anarchist groups on multiple continents. So we should not take these examples as trite but as the imaginative anarchy of some if not others.

Simons' examples in many respects adhere to Bey's notion of the TAZ for in TAZ Bey says that:

"The TAZ is an encampment of guerilla ontologists: strike and run away. Keep moving the entire tribe, even if it's only data in the Web. The TAZ must be capable of defense; but both the 'strike' and the 'defense' should, if possible, evade the violence of the State, which is no longer a meaningful violence. The strike is made at structures of control, essentially at ideas; the defense is 'invisibility,' a martial art, and 'invulnerability' — an 'occult' art within the martial arts. The 'nomadic war machine' conquers without being noticed and moves on before the map can be adjusted. As to the future — Only the autonomous can plan autonomy, organize for it, create it. It's a bootstrap operation."

The TAZ is, thus, about avoidance, about not even being noticed, about living freedom invisibly and in a way that is undefeatable. It is a change of consciousness as we can see it is in the mentalities of those Simons describes as real world examples. "But hold on," you will say. "Those who attack cops are not being 'invisible'." Fair point, up to a point. But they may get away with it. And they most probably came out of nowhere. Like ninjas.

In this it is important to note that the TAZ has the character of insurrection and is critical of the standard narrative of revolution. Revolutions fail (even if they succeed) because they are not new thinking, a change of consciousness. They simply want to replace

imagined bad guys with imagined good guys. These good guys then start the certain journey to becoming the next bad guys soon enough, in all probability, because nothing has really changed except names and faces. But it doesn't matter who the names and faces are. It matters what our consciousness is: it matters how and what we can imagine. An example here is to reimagine the world - but not as any map (drawn according to political orthodoxy) would envision it. Such maps have borders but the ones in anarchy do not. The map is a conjuring and potential enchantment we should refute with spells and imaginings of our own. There is no map. All maps are lies. Casting the map away is then a useful task, it is a reason to imagine. And Hakim Bey thinks we need reasons: "An uprising must be for something."

But for what? Bey's first answer is a good one: the reimagination of close relations. This is not the biological (much less the nuclear) family but "the band", a term used of nomadic hunter-gatherers. It can be thought of here as a self-selecting tribe and its ideal example is the pirate crew, a group which quite literally selects itself and forms its own allegiances. Bey says of the band, as a recommendation, that it is open rather than closed (which the family is for in families you are either related or you are not). The band (as the pirate crew) is, or was, marked by "prodigality" and sharing. Pirates even had contractual rules which mandated sharing as the basis of their association. Imagine a kinship not restricted by biological or marriage connections but rather based on an open and voluntary equality to which you can only commit yourself. Imagine that this kinship must (and can only be) demonstrated in and by your commitment to it in action. There you have the band where everyone is a mother, father, brother, sister as necessary. Doesn't it make more sense that things be this way too? Here no one possesses or controls anyone and all are equally related to others in all directions. Pretty soon you've created a social grouping that replaces capitalist and patriarchal society entirely.

Bey's second answer to what the TAZ is for is to be the "festival" or "dinner party". I'm not middle class enough to have ever been to a dinner party but I have been to one or two parties simply put so I get the idea. As a student of Jesus of Nazareth I am also aware of the parable (found in Luke's gospel in chapter 14, Matthew's in chapter 22 and that of Thomas in saying 64) known as the parable of the feast. This parable imagines the kingdom of God as a dinner party but where the potential guests are scandalising to polite society for the rules of acceptability have been changed by the host! Scandalously, this is a dinner party where anyone might find themselves sitting next to anybody else – whoever turns up and accepts the invitation, in fact. That is an absolutely fantastic example of a gospel "change of consciousness" and this can be seen perfectly In that most people, even today, don't get that parable and those who do probably feel embarrassed about it and its scandalous consequences. In this parable a better and more blessed time and place is explicitly conjured and Hakim Bey's TAZ is simply this put into practice in the quite basic idea of shared time and shared use of the senses as a break from the more depressing norm and a reminder that things don't have to be that way. The insurrection is a festival, a communal enjoyment, a taste of the good life within reimagined social and political contexts. It is a holiday whenever you want one. It is an outbreak (and perhaps a spontaneous outbreak) of rogue consciousness. It is organising yourself. It is a seed. It is the union of egoists. It is fighting for your right to party.

Bey's third answer as to what a TAZ is for is that it is for "psychic nomadism", a concept which is really just a linguistic way to signify the ability to move from one human tradition to another, to constantly create, syncretise, synthesize and mix. He links this with various (often French) intellectual ideas such as Deleuze and Guattari's "Nomadology" or Jean-Francois Lyotard's "Driftworks" (I know nothing about these particular intellectual currents). Bey links the idea in general to living in an era post "the death of God"

(prophesied by Nietzsche as early as 1882) in which this event becomes a de-centering intellectual move, the possibility for “a multi-perspectived post-ideological worldview”. One might see this as an opportunity to disturb various “tyrannical false unit[ies]” which attempt to usurp God’s place as he has been forced to vacate his throne. We know what those presumptive powers and forces might be. But our response should not be to simply offer another one but to glory in the freedom and opportunity for diversification.

If, in the past, we were all expected to have one God, and if all that the mainstream has to offer us now is God substitutes like states and corporations, then we think differently and change consciousness by becoming so diverse in our thinking and acting that the very idea of a god “over all” becomes impossible to contemplate. Saying “God is dead” is a good start but going on to make “gods” impossible is a more committed attachment to the theme. And so Hakim Bey’s mention of “creative destruction” makes absolute sense here and *“These nomads practice the razzia, they are corsairs, they are viruses; they have both need and desire for TAZs, camps of black tents under the desert stars, interzones, hidden fortified oases along secret caravan routes, ‘liberated’ bits of jungle and bad-land, no-go areas, black markets, and underground bazaars.”* These self-organising and individually imagined ideas have no need to be coordinated or to link up. The links, connections and relations would best be ad hoc and on the hoof or as need arise anyway. They create an alternative, ever-changing and always incorrect occult “map” of the world on an entirely new and different basis, one not imposed from above but created from below – and always wrong because always changing – because it is always passing away as much as it is being created. It is a becoming change, a taking part in transformation. It is the imagination of a preliminary network of piracy with its various enclaves and ships at sea and lanes of communication – or what Bey himself calls “the secret caravan routes and raiding trails which make up the flowlines of tribal economy”.

The TAZ, it must be said plainly, is then utopian and has a haunting existence. It is utopian in the sense that it is coming from nowhere – and is nowhere. Yet this is dangerous for the material manifestation of it is not – it is definitely somewhere and, as a result, it may be in the crosshairs of several material forces and must always watch out for the pervasive intrusion of cops. Yet that utopian aspect to it also puts it on an occult map of reality too, one visible only to adepts and one which may deceive the uninitiated. In this sense, it is both visible and invisible, both there and yet not, an imaginative intrusion into physical space. You cannot kill ideas. But you can kill people.

The modern world is in fact entirely based on “killing people”, whether the slaves used up in order to build it or the natives outside of Western Europe in other lands who got in the way of it. Hakim Bey, no stranger to magical texts himself, explains it as the outworking of magus John Dee’s “magical imperialism” by which he devised a British Empire (something to which Alan Moore also variously refers). By such means the “New World” was imagined alchemically as a wild “base metal” to be transmuted into perfected colonial “gold”. But such an imaginary, as Bey notes, requires a fascination with the base, the wild, the wilderness, the untamed. They have and contain a magical (imaginary) existence. But what if the civilised were to prefer this wildness to their imagined superior civilisation? Such is the example Hakim Bey gives when he refers to the cryptic Roanoke message “Gone to Croatan” in TAZ. For the message indeed meant that the European colonists had preferred to turn native and indigenous, abandoning their civilisation, than to conjure their own civilisation from the wilderness. Their magic was preferring the native and indigenous life. They saw differently and changed consciousness. Funnily enough, it was also people similar to these who, being mistreated by “civilisation”, would turn pirate, renounce all their nationalities and churchly moralities, and begin living for themselves. The magic of the State and of the Church CAN be refuted and renounced. It only takes

you imagining it in order for a new life to begin. And that usually begins with refusal and rejection of dominating narratives. Only then can you begin to imagine... something else. Recognise your oppressions (Family? Material circumstances? Politics? Work?) and then imagine a world without them. Its somewhere to start. The TIZ is actualising your autonomy and the TAZ is an example of materialising it. Become a pirate. Turn feral. Embrace the wild.

I now expand beyond TAZ (but surely not TIZ) in looking at a few more works from Hakim Bey. For ease of reference, I'll mostly stick to a few pieces contained in the book *Spiritual Destinations of an Anarchist*. This title might make the militantly atheist anarchist jumpy but such precious flowers need not worry. If even the very mention of "spirituality" makes you upset then this is probably not for you. But in anarchy very few things are compulsory so find something imaginative in another way instead for, even though I would certainly suggest imagination is compulsory for the anarchist (because, quite frankly, it should be compulsory for the human being), this is not to say what any particular person should be imaginative about or how. Hakim Bey himself was consistently imaginative and questioning in regard to many spiritual and even religious traditions, doing considerable study in these fields, and this actually makes rather a lot of sense if you think about it since people seem to have entertained all kinds of spiritual beliefs just about as far back as we can reasonably investigate them. We human beings do seem to exist as specks of dust in a much greater whole and how that works and interacts (and what it means) is hardly, as a consequence, the most irrelevant form of imaginative engagement we could involve ourselves in. We may also note, before we continue, that this certainly does not need to implicate gods – although even if it does we can ask what function they serve in a way found useful.

As it turns out, in the piece “Spiritual Anarchism: Topics for Research” Hakim Bey is basically laying out a kind of preliminary narrative for understanding the human journey from the Stone Age to today. This begins with the “Stone Age Conservative (tribal, roughly egalitarian, proto-shamanic, hunter/gatherer/gardener, gift economy, etc.)” and progresses via the “domestication of the ‘Wild Man’”. This is his version of a tale I would also tell in which ancient human beings existed in non-authoritarian ways very much in touch with the sexual and earthy nature of which they were so obviously simply a part. In fact, nature, we could say, was both their god and their provider (and so their god because it was their provider. So it is, for example, not especially silly to worship the sun for the sun is at least physically there and actually keeping you alive). As a consequence, a more ancient human polity was not official and organised. It was fairly unassuming and immanent folk spirituality (deification of nature) that was sexually mediated in a communal way. It was not questioned because no one needed to question it and it was hardly oppressive. Certain figures would arise as shamans or druids but these were mediators not authorities. This is to be sharply distinguished from hierarchies, official religions and people endowed with political or religious authority that required obedience. Bey here mentions “state religion” and “the emergence of money as the Sexuality of the Dead” as the poisons intruding into, and eventually overtaking, such spirituality. (Money is symbolic exchange but sex is physically intimate actual exchange. In *Black Dog* I referred to scholarship which highlighted actual sexually-mediated societies.)

From here in Bey’s exploratory and investigative narrative the human race goes through Bronze and Iron Age civilisation which creates authorities both civil and religious. Religion becomes a power base as opposed to a mediation and relation to the natural world around you. It has the character of something of a separation. (That which requires the mediation of some official or institutional representative inevitably cuts off the individual

from immediate experience and direct relation.) Here Bey paints Christianity as a resistance cult (Christianity, as Bey rightly notes, was never uniform and originated in multiple variants) which, with Constantine, is appropriated as Roman state religion. Bey divines in such examples a basic contradiction of religion as it tries to “make official” what was never meant to be. It is as if the spiritual content of the native and immanent spirituality cannot do service as official dogma that requires obedience. In such a situation, those who wish to return to the native spirituality are regarded as heretics now denying a faith and an institutionalisation of belief. This is as much because the native spirituality denies the political consequences built upon the institutionalisation of belief as because it denies the faith. Politically, religion creates people with authority to obey that the spirituality never had because it never needed them. Thus:

“Spirituality does not equal religion. Spirituality is the imaginal creative (esprit) of the social; religion its inverse of negation, its ‘spectre’ as [William] Blake says: the alienation of that creativity into powers of oppression. However, due to complex paradoxes of dialectics, the kernel of spirituality is often found encased in shells of religion—especially the mystics (e.g. Eckhardt and the Spiritual Franciscans)—and the poison of religion often taints the heresies, especially if they gain real power.”

Spirituality and religion are here imagined as different things working different purposes. One works to serve imaginal creativity whilst the other works to do the opposite or to act as its controlling negation. Spirituality, or a re-spiritualisation of religion, can only seem to religion as a heresy or apostasy or schism. Bey wants to both recognise and honour the many such examples of such things in the last two millennia as examples of a “freedom of consciousness” (as opposed to “freedom of ideology”) which bridges the Cynics of ancient Greece (seen by a number of people, including myself, as proto-anarchists) and the

anarchists of today. “Spiritual resistance”, imagines Bey, IS a form of resistance. Movements like the Levellers, the Diggers, the Ranters, the Quakers were both religious and political in motivation. (As I also noted elsewhere, much of early American anarchism, as reported by Crispin Sartwell, begins in religious convictions which are worked out through political principle.) Gerrard Winstanley, as I have discussed several times before, based his political ideas about society on the spiritual notion of the earth as a “common treasury”. The sharp distinction between spiritual and political in evidence today was simply not there in former times and situations. Indeed, in many places today a kind of double play (or double standard) goes on where they both are and yet aren’t separated at the same time. Bey’s point, however, is that spiritual resistance is still resistance and is a valid form of the same.

An interesting aspect to this that Bey finds, though, is that extremisms to either side can become dangerous. Various so-called “Gnostic” or otherwise Neo-Platonic dualisms which reject the material or make physical creation subservient to a superior world of the immaterial essentially condemn the social and natural worlds. Such people can develop destructive hatreds of the physical and the body. But, then, again, there are many rabidly materialist and science-worshipping anarchists who abhor the spiritual or more broadly imaginative in a way that comes to laud technology and scientific progress as the only worthwhile endeavour. Bey here divines dangers from both sides and hints that those who hate the body, from whatever motivation, must end up hating nature and the natural world, part of our current environmental crisis. Nature is not something to have a conquest against nor something to be regarded as “dead resources”. So dualisms of spirit and matter, where one is set against the other, are not helpful here and the key to understanding that is in realising that human beings (and who knows what else?) actually have a foot firmly in BOTH camps: we are both spirit and matter indivisibly. Bey’s

intriguing suggestion here is that a spiritual outlook (which he calls “pantheistic monist”) might actually be able to help us for what we need to do is integrate the spiritual with the material as the ancients once found themselves able to do. “Not a return to the Stone Age but a return of the Stone Age.” A return of integrative and relational immanence in place of the modern transcendent instrumentality.

The point here is that one’s spiritual beliefs are not inconsequential. If they were no one would ever try to control them. People seek for meaning in the void and they find it in the things and connections round about them. In this, their imagination inevitably plays a part. An example is kin. Who is your “family”? Is it simply the people you are most closely biologically related to? Is it an extended tribe of people who all regard themselves as responsible for each other? Is it an entirely self-selected and otherwise physically unrelated group of people? It can be, and has been, all of them in human history. Only how we think of the people with whom we have to do creates the reality of this. “Family” is a human idea that is activated and put into practice by human beings. Our connections, familial, natural and spiritual, are imagined into, and out of, existence for we don’t have to be connected to anyone or anything in a particular imaginative way. But such beliefs about relations to people, and to the natural world more generally, are not merely imaginative things for they have obviously political consequences. If, like Margaret Thatcher, we can imagine that “There is no such thing as society” then that will lead to a different politics than that of the person who believes that nature is one big complete natural system and human beings are all related one to another in social, even familial, connections. Anarchism, in its official around 200 year history, has had several members who reimagined “family” in many different ways. It has also had those who saw its natural and environmental circumstances in almost spiritual ways. It wasn’t just Diogenes who proclaimed “I am a citizen of the world”.

A further consequence of spiritual beliefs besides the political is the ethical. If ways of imagining to organise people by imagining connections between them are essentially attempts at empire building (so the kingdom of God is no different to the union of soviet or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland or the Holy Roman Empire) then doing the same thing also has ethical consequences. (How should I behave towards people and should I behave towards some differently than I do towards others?) Spiritually, however, this also extends further out to our relations with the natural world. I tend to find that that which people revere as intelligent life they also tend to respect more and treat better. This is, being forced to think about it, a spiritual belief, a belief about one's connection to "life" in general. The problem is that "we" tend to have alienated ourselves in general from the natural world to the extent that we don't functionally really give a shit about it so long as we get fed by it and the sun shines on us more often than not. But industrialised farming is a pretty ruthless way to go about it and pretty much anything we eat, animal or vegetable, was once alive and is killed for our benefit. Could it be that what Hakim Bey calls "the logic of technology and money" has replaced a more spiritual and naturalistic logic? Have "religion and ideology" betrayed both us and the world we are a part of? Does imagining ourselves as the masters of nature fatally alter the relation between the two (by setting the relation up as a domination) to the detriment of the whole? Do we need a new framework of ideas? Bey asks:

"Let's say we want to try to imagine a non-authoritarian Green movement based on Proudhonian anarcho-federalism and Kropotkinite mutual aid—basic 'plumb line anarchist' stuff—but rooted in some form of spirituality. Where could we look for inspiration? Do we have a 'tradition?'"

How, in short, can we imagine a modern Stone Age society of anarchist autonomists, a green social egoism? What part might Daoism or Sufism or Kabbalah or shamanism or Christian antinomianism or neo-paganism play in this? Might we unite our political anarchism with magical beliefs and practices like Alan Moore? And might it be helpful if we did? On this, Bey says the following:

"The Critique of Civilization needs a strong science of its own. Post-Enlightenment science with its 'dead matter' crypto-metaphysics needs a Kuhnian revolution. Restitution of meaning. Re-enchantment of the landscape. Not just a Sorelian myth but a real myth. Surrealist Surrationalist Surrealist subversion requires potent Earth-centered spirituality, a Gaia Hypothesis that's more than hypothetical—a spiritual experience. Ecstasy as enstasy. (See Bakhtin)—festival consciousness as magic.

In this context Hermeticism recommends itself because of its rectified neoplatonic view of matter as spirit—the doctrine of Earth as a living being. (Nicholas of Cusa, Pico, Ficino, Cambridge Neoplatonists, etc.) Hermeticism is not a religion but a science of spirit and imagination—empirical, experiential, and experimental. Historically it's closer to us than shamanism or the oriental ways, culturally familiar (though also strange, always strange). It's compatible with Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Hindu mysticism, maybe also with Taoism and Buddhism, certainly with Rosicrucianism and Masonry, and with most of the great heresies."

In this, most of all, we need a willingness to imagine.

If we agree that what we need is imagination (Bey suggests a Hermetical framework for this) and an explicitly green or ecological focus to this then you end up in the "Green

Hermeticism” Hakim Bey has discussed explicitly (not least in two essays in the book *Green Hermeticism*). The basic premise here is a re-enchantment of nature that is resurrected from the deadness to which modern philosophy and science have condemned it under the oversight of a Christianity eager to condemn the physical world as “fallen” and in need of “redemption”. You can, by the way, reject the Christian myth as silly yet nevertheless find yourself accepting most, if not all, of its now secularised premises anyway. Many do. The point here then is that if you want to functionally go a different way then you have to do so both positively and proactively. This is the sense of William Blake’s injunction to build your own system lest you fall prey to someone else’s. So there is no recourse here to being of your day and saying you believe in “science” for, as Bey says in the first essay of *Green Hermeticism*, “science does precisely what state and capital demand of it”. Anything bad happening today has been actively enabled by the scientific valuation of life and the practices that it engages in. Science is not just a method, in other words, it is both a mentality and an evaluating system. It is a replacement for a spirituality that has values. Science is Chernobyl. Science is Bhopal 1984. Science is climate breakdown. Other mentalities, spiritual mentalities, would not have led to these things. But science did because of what and how science values and the function it serves as a means to other ends. (“Science”, of course, wasn’t always like this as Alan and Steve Moore will tell you in their *Moon and Serpent Bumper Book of Magic* or as Alan Moore says by himself in and through his *Promethea* comic book series.) In general terms, you can tell a modern scientist from a more magical scientist in that the former thinks of the earth as dead whereas the latter thinks of the earth as alive.

More broadly speaking here, the situation is that we need a myth, a guiding form of imagination, and Bey illustrates this in the essay “Chaos, Eros, Earth, and Old Night:

Radical Neo-Hermeticism and Ecological Resistance” from *Spiritual Destinations of an Anarchist* by quoting Nietzsche:

“That a great deal of belief must be present . . . - that is the precondition of every living thing and its life. Therefore, what is needed is that something must be held to be true - not that something is true.”

This is like that saying of Nietzsche’s at the beginning of *Twilight of the Idols* which tells us that someone with a ‘why’ of life can get along with any ‘how’. Bey slightly modifies the idea within the body of his essay by talking about “a program for deploying the imaginal process to bring about individual and social transformation” and this idea he says comes from combining reading Nietzsche’s notes in *The Will to Power* with reading in regard to Renaissance Hermeticism. I will be looking into things like this a little more in the next section of this chapter but it is as well to say here that Bey is one of those who points towards it as a useful aide to thinking differently and CHANGING CONSCIOUSNESS. If we must have a myth through which to focus our consciousness (and if the ones the world shoves in our faces are uniformly terrible) then it seems to be a good idea to ask what that myth is and what purpose it serves. So what is “Hermetic Philosophy” (which Bey otherwise refers to as “Natural Magic”)? As per Bey in this essay:

“According to Hermetic philosophy or Natural Magic, the world is alive, and thus, like any living individual, can be said to have spiritual faculties such as intellect and imagination. Imagination is not simply the impotent fantasy of an ego locked inside a skull and able to influence the world only as a ghost in the machine; the Hermetic imagination is a force capable of acting at a distance through the subtle will-substance of attraction focused through images. This can be done because everything is alive and to some degree conscious.

The world carries out this attraction (life attracts life), and the individual consciousness can accomplish the same thing (on a necessarily microcosmic level) through the practice of Natural Magic."

If you think this is barmy then consider gravity, an "attractive" force which you cannot normally see. Consider plants which have no brains and yet manage to cooperate "attractively", even across species, and share resources for their common good (which is how you get forests). (Plants, by the way, are by far the most successful species on earth, by mass if by no other measure, and no animal life would exist without them.) If we think we are alive then why shouldn't the world be alive, or the universe? These, by the way, are serious questions, questions which challenge you not to accept the dogmas that currently happen to be popular or dominant whole. In the past, Hermeticists regarded themselves as magicians and scientists in our terms and sought, based on knowledge intertwined with imagination, to learn about the natural world. But they understood the world as a living organism rather than as dead matter (the latter of which became the dominant scientific paradigm) and "life" was the principle they studied. Based upon this thinking, Bey, in this essay, gives the following proposal as an example of "changing consciousness":

"The proposal: to revive the Hermetic myth of the living Earth as an effective means toward the radical transformation of scientific, technological, and indeed social paradigms; to counter utilitarianism, "progressism," capitalism, and other destructive tendencies based on classical modern science (loosely defined as knowledge of the material world)."

Bey is clear here that this will involve "a transformation of Nature" and he at least means here that nature must be transformed in our imagination away from the dead "resources"

that capitalism imagines it to be into something else. But he goes further than this as well, arguing that it needs to be shown how “the living world could be both necessary and sufficient to further the radical social project of ‘liberatory action’”. The problem with this, as I have been trying to show, is that how you think motivates both what you can and will do and how you can and will see. The mentalities human beings currently serve care little for a “living earth” and have no use for such a thing where an imagined dead one that can be ripped up and made use of will do just fine. This leads directly, in fact, to my point about “a change of consciousness”. This is how serious matters are and how serious they have become. We need to completely change how significant populations of human beings think where their current thinking has been entirely naturalised to the point that they think death and destruction of nature and natural products is entirely normal and legitimate. Where the Hermeticism fits in for Bey is that he thinks of it as one useful myth for illustrating a different point of view, a change of consciousness. The scientific worldview that we have, as Bey comments in this essay, “has been used to justify industrialization, capitalism, behaviorism, and the ravaging of the environment, mega-war”. What is needed is a consciousness that would inhibit such things instead. Radical spiritual beliefs were once the foundation of liberatory politics (Gerrard Winstanley and The Diggers with their “common treasury of the earth” are a common example I have used but there are many others) and Bey imagines they could be again.

So as Bey then goes in to explain:

“For Natural Magic, body, mind, and world are inextricably interwoven. Thus the Hermeticist's attitude toward Nature is neither passive (since we are participants in the world) nor rapacious, dismissive, and destructive. Nature is not ‘fallen’ [as, for example, per the Christian myth] and therefore cannot be considered a mere repository of resources to

be exploited or conquered. Human beings - bodily and cognitively - are both wards and guardians of Gaia, both caretakers and enjoyers, somewhat in the manner taught by Native American shamans. Fourier [as one example], like all the Hermeticists, was fascinated by reports of tribal people still living pre-Neolithic lives; the European mages recognized in such social structures a parallel to their own utopian systems. They intuited an analogy between the shamanism of these societies and their own Neo-Pagan spirituality."

In a "natural spirituality", then, in a philosophy of life in all its forms, we birth an entirely different way not just to act but to be: the context for our lives is completely reimagined. Bey in this essay, for example, imagines a combination of the socialist Charles Fourier and the "individualism" of Nietzsche. Fourier made an erotic sociality of attraction the principle of life itself. Nietzsche, as Bey delightfully describes it here, thought those who had overcome humanity "would find true love and friendship in a society of free spirits, in love, and in art." Nietzsche, it is sometimes overlooked, was a supremely biological philosopher, a philosopher of life and its processes. He valued life *as a principle* and what, in his mind, made that life strong. This is why he is the philosopher who condemns modern life as a kind of nihilism. What overcomes the nihilism for him is a kind of life which one would happily live over and over again, a life of necessarily worthwhile struggles (life wants resistances to overcome for Nietzsche for they are the test, and proof, of its strength). In and through this myth, which Nietzsche himself created as his own change of consciousness, we can see how supremely Nietzsche values life itself. As Bey himself then writes, seeking to unite Fourier and Nietzsche:

"Each of us is a part of Nature, it is true, but our value as individuals is not thereby lessened in any way, since it would be equally true to say that Nature is a part of us, each of us

individually. Nature's freedom from all abstract 'categorical imperatives' does not reduce all biota to a faceless mass; on the contrary, it restores to each thing its own true unique face."

In concluding his essay, Bey ties in what he has been saying with the TAZ. On the one hand this phenomenon is a tactic of disappearance or avoidance (of "official" forces and territories). But here he imagines it as a phenomenon of "reappearance". If "Hermeticism" or visions of "a living earth" went out of style why should they not reappear again? Bey in fact thinks of the myth of the living earth (the imagination of the earth as a living entity) as "the myth of the body". We might here in fact speculate, based on what Bey has been saying, that life itself is but a myth, a dream, an act of imagination. The question is then always "What is your myth doing and what is it for?" Is it socially controlling or liberatory? Is it encouraging of autonomy or authoritarianism? Here Bey makes the point, which I may have made earlier musing on the consequences of Alan and Steve Moore's magical insights, that "modern mass psychologists (i.e. not least business leaders, media owners and politicians) and advertisers already practice a magical propaganda, but for purposes of control rather than liberation." Consequently, we need counter-spells and counter-myths, new acts of imagination with which to fight a war of ideas. This is very much how Hakim Bey sees it too. Science and religion fight battles for control. But with new myths, and with sometimes unashamedly spiritual myths, we could fight battles for freedom and liberty instead. But it is always about what you can imagine and what you are imagining. Bey suggests here near his close that we fight for "the interpenetration and mutual seduction of everyday life and wild(er)ness." We need to "give up being 'mentors' of nature and just get out of the way."

In a further essay from *Spiritual Destinations of an Anarchist*, this time "Quantum, Chaos, & the Oneness of Being: Meditations on the Kitab al-Alef", Hakim Bey discusses modern

quantum scientific ideas in relation to those in an Islamic text. Both Islam and quantum science have their guiding myths, of course (as they must), but it is interesting to read this piece in terms of what they are and how different (or similar) they become. It is also interesting because those within these various traditions are not necessarily always trying to do the same things either, for example. Consider, then, the following extended observation that Hakim Bey makes in regard to physics, the Islamic text he is considering, and quantum science. Notice how BOTH (as well as Bey) are telling stories:

"In science, at least since Einstein, a trend can be noted away from Cartesian dualism and Newtonian mechanism, toward a unification of reality. Space and time are seen as aspects of a single continuum and, in the search for a Unified Field Theory, Einstein and his followers worked on the assumption that even more radical unifications and identifications can be made. Stephen Hawking, the current master of this school, believes that within the next 20 years a Grand Unified Theory (or 'GUT') will emerge to reconcile the so-called four basic forces in physics: gravity, electromagnetism and the strong and weak forces. The Big Bang theory and the existence of black holes and 'naked singularities' point in Hawking's view toward a single expression of the origin of matter and energy, a beginning of time and the universe (or multiverse). These ideas have suggested (to some people) some parallels with traditional concepts such as the infinite but bounded expanding/contracting universe of Hinduism. Yet, interestingly, Hawking himself has declared all comparisons between physics and Oriental wisdom to be sheer 'rubbish'. In his view, a unified theory is not at all the same thing as an expression of the oneness of being. In effect, by maintaining the inevitability of a final and complete set of theorems to describe reality, Hawking may simply be attempting to extend mechanism and dualism to their logical conclusion - for the existence of a GUT, a Grand Unified Theory, implies the existence of a separate consciousness to apprehend and grasp the Grand Unified Theory. An observer and an

observed, a machine with two parts. If, as Thomas Kuhn believes, social and psychological perceptions underlie all scientific paradigms, then Hawking would appear still to be searching for that Judeo-Christian God who does not play dice with the universe (so dear to Einstein's imagination); even though Hawking claims to accept quantum mechanics and its 'god', who (in John Wheeler's words) not only plays dice with the universe, but throws them where we can't find them. In short, Hawking's nostalgia for finality implies (to me) a theology underlying his cosmology, a yearning for a creator-god. Post-Einsteinian physics of this sort might better be compared with monotheism or even deism than with monism.

Personally, I find Hawking's belief in the end of physics a depressing notion. A universe stripped of mystery would quickly become a hell of boredom. Reality, according to the Hadith, is veiled with seventy thousand (i.e. an infinity of) veils of light and dark. To penetrate them all would collapse the fabric of reality. As Ibn 'Arabi pointed out in his commentary on this Hadith in the Tarjuman, God's Mercy lies precisely in the ultimate impenetrability of reality's fabric, for being itself depends on the essential unknowableness of the Unity. 'The Tao that can be spoken is not the Tao.' [The opening line of the Daodejing.] In the dance of Shiva, in the changing multiplicity of the ten thousand things, there and only there does the Unity unveil itself.

Hawking is correct to feel that this kind of 'Orential Wisdom' is inimical to his hopes. But other branches of modern science than his might revel in the idea that reality's essential uncertainty or unprovability is equally important as the idea of its oneness. Heisenberg's famous Uncertainty Principle and Gödel's Proof of the unprovability of mathematics, do no violence to the idea of the oneness of being. In fact, they support such concepts of unity. However, they do in fact imply that any mathematical or physical description or 'map' of the universe (reality) would have to be exactly as big as the reality it describes - whereupon the

universe would double in size - whereupon you would need a new description based on that doubling - and so on in infinite regress - with no end to the unfolding of those infinities which drove Georg Cantor mad, and drove Ibn 'Arabi to sanctity - the unending stripping away of veils of light and darkness.

The Quantum theorists happily inhabit a universe which is not only 'stranger than we imagined, but stranger than we can imagine', a rather Alice-like world in which Schroedinger's Cat may be both simultaneously alive and dead, in which particles seem to communicate telepathically, or else - viewed in a certain light - suddenly become waves instead of particles. Quantum mechanics has reinserted human consciousness into a central position in its world view, a position from which modern science supposedly banished all such spooks long ago. According to the usual 'orthodox' Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, the observer participates and is inextricably involved in the universe observed. In a sense we create by the act of observation. This leads the Copenhagenists to declare, 'There is no deep reality.' Objects, every day real things, 'float on a world that is not real.' (Bohr and Heisenberg, respectively.) Other theorists, however, interpret quantum differently. For Heider, Bohm and others, 'reality is an undivided wholeness.' In this interpretation, 'the observer appears as a necessary part of the whole structure and in his full capacity as a conscious being. The separation of the world into an 'objective outside reality' and 'us', the self-conscious onlookers can no longer be maintained. Object and subject have become inseparable from each other. ' According to Bohm, 'One is led to a new notion of unbroken wholeness which denies the classical analyzability of the world into separately and independently existing parts... The inseparable quantum interconnectedness of the whole universe is the fundamental reality.' Bell's Theorem, which proves or seems to prove that quantum reality is non-local, bolsters rather than deflates the very Ibn 'Arabi-like contentions of Bohm and his theories of "implicate wholeness". Something in Bell's

Theorem seems to be violating Einstein's cosmic speed limit. Some super-liminal aether or field, or faster-than-light particle, or even 'telepathic' particle.

The crux of quantum mechanics is the question of the collapse of the wave function, the point at which probability 'becomes' actuality. Everett and Wheeler offer the delightful notion that the wave function never collapses, that all possible events occur, but in alternative parallel universes, a notion beloved of science fiction writers as well as mystics."

Now you might be surprised that a person such as Hakim Bey, so spiritually interested as he is, is also writing about quantum science so interestedly. (He is not the only one either. Alan Moore, a man who knowingly worships an entirely invented snake god, Glycon, and who openly calls himself a "magician" in all seriousness, is also a well known subscriber to *The New Scientist* magazine and proclaims himself a believer in Einstein's four dimensional "block universe" theory which is a determinist theory.) But I don't think this should surprise you. What both men (who were both anarchists – Hakim Bey died in May 2022) are doing is exploring the human imagination whether that be in religious, spiritual, artistic or scientific fields. If you read Alan and Steve Moore's *Moon and Serpent Bumper Book of Magic* you will read a fine essay there in which all these things are described as original components of something best thought of simply as "magic" in which "magic" is simply an exploration of human imagination as fed by human perceptions, intuitions and ideas. When John's gospel says "In the beginning was the Word" – in the mind of its author referring to Jesus – it might actually not have been far off. For inasmuch as "the word", language, is a useful term to describe our ability to begin linguistically expressing ourselves and, by means of it, manipulating our experience in space-time, this is analogous with the imagination I am here talking about. All we are doing is creatively imagining – with words, with art, with ideas – and building out worlds – scientifically,

religiously, spiritually, politically. (So, as Bey reports of Heisenberg, “Atoms are not things”. They are ideas of things and the relationships they can be imagined to have. “There is no quantum world”, adds Niels Bohr. But you can imagine one and imagine to orientate things within it.) Consciousness (and the interactions that necessarily entails) creates reality? Reality is imaginatively constructed relationships? “Everything is one” – as various religious AND scientific traditions now suggest? And consciousness, imagination, is radically a part of this in an inseparable way.

And so we find ourselves back with “chaos” – or so it might seem. In TAZ Hakim Bey seems to regard this as something of a liberating force and in my explorations of the nihilistic void (at least this far) I would not much disagree with this view. (‘Nothing’ certainly seems freer than the capitalist-authoritarian jails my fellow humans seem to keep wanting to put me in.) The opposite of authorities is no authorities. The opposite of authoritarianism is nihilism. In terms of this discussion – as I wrap up my interaction with Hakim Bey – it means we find ourselves in a realm of imagination where that imagination is constitutive of the realities we inhabit or, perhaps more to the point, that inhabit us. And so we are free to imagine – as, in fact, we must – and free to imagine as an act of will “beyond good and evil” as Nietzsche might usefully add. It is changes of consciousness which change the world and in the work of Hakim Bey we learn of that as the imaginative task in a context of anarchy. Yet if we read Bey’s piece from 2014 “The New Nihilism” we find there a depressed and somewhat defeated man. The death march of Capitalism and “technopathocracy” seems victorious. Chernyshevsky’s question “What is to be done?” seems to be answered with the horrifying realisation that nothing *can* be done. Congratulations, we lost. Those who would plough us into the dirt with the rest of the earth won. The Apocalypse came and went but it wasn’t the victory of love and happiness and human cooperation but of violent conquest and exploitation. And it never ends. Life

is a prison and the boot really is stamping on your face. Forever. The realisation dawns it was all a scam. And the scam worked.

Now:

"All the fashionable 'solutions' to the 'crisis', from electronic democracy to revolutionary violence, from locavorism to solar-powered dingbats, from financial market regulation to the General Strike—all of them, however ridiculous or sublime, depend on one preliminary radical change—a seismic shift in human consciousness. Without such a change all the hope of reform is futile. And if such a change were somehow to occur, no 'reform' would be necessary. The world would simply change. The whales would be saved. War no more. And so on. What force could (even in theory) bring about such a shift?

... It would seem quite pointless to wait around for such a rebirth of the Social. Years ago many radicals gave up all hope of The Revolution, and the few who still adhere to it remind me of religious fanatics. It might be soothing to lapse into such doctrinaire revolutionism, just as it might be soothing to sink into mystical religion—but for me at least both options have lost their savor. Again, I sympathize with those true believers (although not so much when they lapse into authoritarian leftism or fascism)— nevertheless, frankly, I'm too depressed to embrace their Illusions."

Where there is no vision, the people perish. But what then?

In this piece Bey has three options:

1. Passive escapism. Basically this is “hide” in and amongst the system of death that rules over and incarcerates us. Do your best to avoid its overt attention. Maybe you’ll somehow scrape a minimum natural life on this planet of murder and human terror.

2. Active escapism. This is the logic which creates the TAZ. Basically, make “zones of freedom” in and as much as you can. Snatch periods of authenticity from your forced incarceration and become determined and daring about it. I note that a lot of the ideas collected together under the rubric of this idea are social. They involve finding friends and allies ON PURPOSE in order to make the escapism more real and more possible. One can find pleasures by oneself but if one finds friends then one finds more and better pleasures. One could, for example, establish some kind of communal living space (from one house to one whole settlement) or a group of people who could organise multiple regular activities. These can be concentrated on the cultivation of stolen pleasures and moments of authenticity or on the destruction and attack of that which oppresses us such as we find Bey discussing in the essay “The Occult Assault on Institutions” where he finds particularly the media a very worthy target. (And, after all, it is the media which is filling our head daily with doom and lies so that the Death System can control us that much better.) Point being: Do what you can, find ways to live (and love) according to your will. Don’t let the bastards defeat you even if they hold seemingly insurmountable power. Every Smaug has a soft underbelly somewhere. You live once. Just do it.

3. Revenge. Bey gets a bit lost here. Revenge against what or who? It can certainly be with no hope of success so must be for “its own sake”. Anarchists killed multiple presidents (and others) in the past. It made no difference. If a thousand Luigis rose up to slay a thousand CEOs then a thousand more CEOs would just be appointed (and cop goon squads sent out to capture the more obvious perpetrators). You don’t stop systems by

killing individuals. And, even if you might relieve a particularly nasty individual of their sorry and destructive life, there's always another the system has prepared coming down the poo pipe of life. So revenge has an atmosphere of despair hanging around it and this I understand for despair is not the most inappropriate response to our collective condition. The fact is, however, that most people won't have the stones for "revenge" anyway. So some form of "escapism" it probably is.

The nihilism in and amongst all of this is not lost on Bey, however (hence the title of the piece). He interestingly thinks of this as "creative despair". This seems to me to be where we are. Thus: "Ontological anarchy, Desire, Life itself, & the Darkness of revolt & negation—all seem to me as real as they need to be." So what have we to lose in our Total Imaginative Zone? Why not plot revenge? Why not engage in "active escapism"? You're bound for the grave regardless and the fate of universes is not yours to determine. There is you. There is Anarchy. There is Desire. There is Life itself. There is revolt for its own sake. And there is Nothing. Create what you can. But know that none of it was ever meant to last. All you can do is hope to survive for at least a while by acts of ever changing consciousness.

C) An Imaginary Universe and The Task of Transformation

If I am right in all I am saying here and what we need is *a change of consciousness*, to think differently to how our incarcerating, exploitative and authoritarian human society thinks, then what we need is to start again, from scratch, with nothing. So let's do just that and see where it takes us...

"There might not be a mysterious 'dark' force accelerating the expansion of the Universe after all. The truth could be much stranger – bubbles of space where time passes at drastically different rates.

The passage of time isn't as constant as our experience with it suggests. Areas of higher gravity experience a slower pace of time compared with areas where gravity is weaker, a fact that could have some pretty major implications on how we compare rates of cosmic expansion according to a recently developed model called 'timescape cosmology'.

Discrepancies in how fast time passes in different regions of the Universe could add up to billions of years, giving some places more time to expand than others. When we look at distant objects through these time-warping bubbles, it could create the illusion that the expansion of the Universe is accelerating.

Two new studies have analyzed more than 1,500 supernovae to investigate how likely the concept could be – and found that the timescape model might be a better fit for observations than our current best model.

The standard model of cosmology does a pretty good job of explaining the Universe – provided we fudge the numbers a bit. There doesn't seem to be enough mass to account for the gravitational effects we observe, so we invented an invisible placeholder called 'dark matter'.

There also seems to be a strange force that counteracts gravity, pushing the cosmos to expand at accelerating rates. We don't know what it is yet, so in the same spirit we dubbed

it 'dark energy'. All of this comes together, along with ordinary matter, to form what we call the lambda cold dark matter (Λ CDM) model.

The problem is that this model uses a simplified equation that assumes the whole Universe is smooth, and expands at the same speed everywhere. But it's far from smooth out there: we see a colossal cosmic web, criss-crossed by filaments of galaxies separated by vast voids emptier than we can comprehend.

Timescape cosmology takes that 'lumpiness' into account. More matter means stronger gravity, which means slower time – in fact, an atomic clock located in a galaxy could tick up to a third slower than the same clock in the middle of a void.

When you stretch that over the huge lifespan of the Universe, billions more years may have passed in the voids than in the matter-dense areas. A mind-boggling implication of that is that it no longer makes sense to say that the Universe has a single unified age of 13.8 billion years. Instead, different regions would have different ages.

And since so much more time has passed in the voids, more cosmological expansion has taken place there. Therefore, if you look at an object on the far side of a void, it would appear to be moving away from you much faster than something on this side of the void. Over time, these voids take up a larger proportion of the Universe, creating the illusion of an accelerating expansion, without needing to conjure up any dark energy.

In 2017, astronomers from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand tested timescape cosmology against observations, and found that it was a slightly better fit than Λ CDM to explain cosmic expansion. More data was needed.

So for the new studies, an astronomy team from the University of Canterbury and the German University of Heidelberg has collected and analyzed that extra data in the form of a catalog of 1,535 Type Ia supernovae. These explosions shine with a predictable brightness every time, so shifts in their light can reliably reveal distance, speed and direction of movement. As such, they're often called 'standard candles.'

This time, the astronomers say they've found "very strong evidence in favor of timescape over Λ CDM." This suggests a potential need to rethink the foundations of cosmology.

"Dark energy is a misidentification of variations in the kinetic energy of expansion, which is not uniform in a Universe as lumpy as the one we actually live in," says David Wiltshire, a physicist at the University of Canterbury.

"The research provides compelling evidence that may resolve some of the key questions around the quirks of our expanding cosmos. With new data, the Universe's biggest mystery could be settled by the end of the decade."

Both studies were published in the journal 'Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society'.

It reminds me of 'Aether', a substance concocted to explain how it was possible for light (and later, all electro-magnetic and gravitational forces) to travel through a vacuum. It turned out not to exist. 'Dark energy' was assumed to exist in order to explain an accelerating expansion of the universe. But if the universe's expansion is not accelerating, then dark energy is not needed. So far, no one has proved that dark energy (and for that matter, dark matter) exists." (Science Alert, "Dark Energy May Not Exist")

"your authority and responsibility as a magician... is to construct a magic universe out of your life that is uniquely yours"

"Artwork... you have brought something into being out of nothingness... The Art"

"Since as human beings we apparently construct reality around ourselves by using language as our building-blocks, magical theory would suggest that by manipulating language, the magician can be said in some way to manipulate reality."

"The heavily Kabbalah-influenced Western magical tradition, which had been investigating the myth-haunted underworld of the sub-conscious long before Professor Freud expressed such ideas, places dreams and the imagination at the lunar ninth sphere of awareness known as Yesod, an old Hebrew word meaning 'foundation'."

"'reality' and dreams are not two separate worlds at all, but are instead merely two points in an unbroken continuity."

"Acceptance that the god experience has a reality is very different from accepting that the god itself exists, and being armed with this perspective might enable us to gain some insight into that experience without requiring us to credit the experience's stated provenance."

"If we subscribe to the idea that consciousness is an emergent property of systems which have passed a certain threshold of complexity, then its conceivable that entities are genuinely sentient ideas, concepts of a sufficient intricacy to spontaneously reach a point of self-awareness."

"If the idea of a god is literally a god, as we have posited, then all that is at issue for practitioners is the intensity with which that idea is experienced."

"all entities must presumably have begun 'life' as a certain type or class of fiction, and there is no reason to suppose within our notions of conceptual space that relatively modern idea-constructs would not be as potent as those of the ancient Greeks."

"in trafficking with an apparently divine awareness we are liable to radically expand our own."

"Science has confirmed, perhaps reluctantly, that by subscribing to a system of belief of some kind, rational or otherwise, we are statistically more likely to live longer and potentially more satisfying lives. Prayer therefore has a place, as the placebo has a place in medicine."

"Our point is that these beings either exist, in whatever sense we mean the word existence, or they don't."

"Magic systems wholly based upon material results appear to regard magic as a morally inert and neutral force like electricity, useful for powering our appliances or magic sigils, and not as a living thing which might be thought to have its own agendas. This is not to say, of course, that magic cannot, or should not, have an effect on the material world. While magic obviously cannot contravene the laws of physics governing material existence, it can massively affect the world in an entirely plausible and rational manner simply through its traffic in new concepts. Without Dr (John) Dee's ideas, for example, the entirety of Western history after the 16th century would be altered unrecognisably. This is the way in which

Dee's magic changed the globe, while we would note that his occasional requests to Enochian angels for financial aid seem to have gone largely unanswered."

*"In the pursuit of power over the external world, practical magic is in danger of forgetting that power over our internal world and its unlimited resources is the only thing which truly matters." (Excerpts from the six "Things to do on a rainy day" essays in Alan Moore and Steve Moore, *The Moon and Serpent Bumper Book of Magic*)*

"Alchemy, as I perceive it, is a spiritual tradition, a means for exploring our inner space and the layers which clothe the precious essence of our innermost soul. It is a path, a way, a practical method for investigating the substance of our being, by meditating upon chemical processes. The alchemists worked with their retorts, heating, calcining, subliming, distilling substances, watching all the while the transformations within their experiments. They used events in their experiments as seed images for meditations, forming visual mantras from chemical changes. The alchemists reflected and mirrored these outward events into their interior world. They saw the processes in their flasks as an interaction and linking of the spiritual and the material. The spirit rose up, separating from the substance at the bottom of their flasks and descended again to spiritualise the material into an essence or tincture. As the alchemists reworked these experiments over in their souls, they further drew parallels with the greater laboratory of Nature. They saw the work within their flasks as a kind of microcosm of macrocosmic Nature. The living energies and beings in Nature were metaphorically drawn into their retorts, as they began to picture the living alchemical processes through animal symbols. For example, a black toad was a good image for the seething black mass of substance digesting in the flask, while a white eagle was a beautiful way of describing the white steam or fumes which rose up into the neck of the flask from the substance being heated below.

I would just like us to consider some of the more important of these animal symbols. Alchemists were, of course, individualists who worked alone, rather than being members of sodalities or secret orders, yet despite their writings being a result of their own experiences, the animal metaphors rapidly developed into a universal language. In the centuries before the invention of printing, key alchemical manuscripts, often with beautiful illuminated illustrations, circulated quite widely. Works like the Aurora Consurgens (attributed to Thomas Aquinas), the Buch der Heiligen Dreigaltigkeit, the works of Ramon Lull, Roger Bacon, Arnold of Villa Nova, exist in many manuscript collections from this period, and with this exchange of ideas a quite coherent set of metaphors emerged in the European Alchemical tradition. It was the coherence and universality of this set of alchemical symbols that lead Carl Jung to the concept of the collective unconscious. The alchemists, though pursuing their inner work independently as individuals, nevertheless found in their interior descent a coherent language of symbols.

At the core of this was a vision of an alchemical process occurring through a cycle of colour changes, from an initial blackness to the perfection of the quintessence. The alchemist envisaged each stage of the process being heralded by a colour change and a meeting with certain animals.

Blackening - Black Crow, Raven, Toad, Massa Confusa.

Whitening - White Swan, White Eagle, skeleton.

Greening - Green Lion.

Rapid cycling through iridescent colours - Peacock's Tail.

White Stone - Unicorn.

Reddening - Pelican feeding young with its own blood, cockerel.

Final transmutation - Phoenix reborn from the fire.

The phase of Blackening which usually marked the beginning of the work, was brought about either by heating the prima materia in the process of Calcination (the 'dry way' of the alchemists), or by the process of Putrefaction, a slow rotting or digestion over a period of weeks or months (the so-called 'wet way'). The Black Crow or Raven was often associated with this Calcination, for on vigorous heating the calcined material would usually carbonise and layers would flake off and move like a crow's wings in the flask. The Toad was a better symbol of the Putrefaction, the decaying mass slowly pulsating and shifting as gasses were given off, while the substance rotted down to a black mass. Another symbol of this stage was the dragon, a familiar inhabitant of the alchemists flasks. The dragon is however a more complex symbol and is also used when winged as a symbol for the spiritualising of the earthly substance. Thus to the alchemists the dragon appeared at the beginning and at the end of the work.

The alchemists paralleled these experiences in their souls as a withdrawal into the darkness of their interior space, a darkness pregnant with possibility. We have to a great extent lost the sense that still lived in the medieval and renaissance alchemists, that this darkness contained all potentialities. Like children we fear the dark, and for twentieth century humanity darkness often holds only an existential dread - philosophers of science have in the last decade brought us this terrible image of the 'Black Hole' which swallows up and annihilates everything that comes into its orbit. Perhaps we do not gaze enough at the blackness of the heavens. For if we look deep into the blackness of space on a clear night, we will sense more stars hidden between the known visible stars, especially in the vast star fields of the Milky Way. Cosmic space is pregnant with the possibility of other worlds as yet unseen. It is this image of blackness we must try to recover if we are to become alchemists. An echo of this perhaps remains in the often used phrase 'a profound darkness'. In alchemy, to meet with the black crow is a good omen. Thus in the Chymical Wedding of Christian

Rosenkreutz, as our hero sets out on his journey of transformation, he meets with a Crow which by a turn of fate decides which among the various paths open to him is the one that will lead him to the Castle of the King.

The temporary phase of whitening which followed on the black stage was symbolised by the white eagle or white swan. As the black mass of the calcination was reacted with other substances and heated, it took on a white crust or dusty layer which sometimes puffed up and flew in a cloud in the flask, as heat exploded bubbles of gas out of the black substance below. This was the White Eagle of the dry way. In the wet way, the dark putrefying matter sometimes began to form white patches, often fungal growths floating on the surface, or white crystals growing out of the mass. This could be pictured as the White Swan, which was at home upon the surface of the water yet fed off of the dark mud at the bottom of the stream or lake. Its whiteness contrasting with the mud on which it is observed to feed, made it a fine symbol of how spiritual purity could be gained from the unpromising primal material.

The whitening is a phase when we sense or have a prevision of the end of the work. It is a polar swing from out of the blackening - the appearance of seeds of the future development of the work. It is that stage of catharsis after some intense experience of being consumed in the crucible, when we glimpse the appearance, however fragmentary, of a new possibility - a flickering light in our souls which draws us towards its promise of change. We all experience these alchemical phases in our inner life, though nowadays, immersed as we are in twentieth century images which often lack a spiritual core, we often fail to recognise these to be of any value, but if we are able to use the alchemical view of inner transformation, which we might need to mould and shape to suite our present consciousness, we can gain much inner perception and growth. For our blackness becomes a

pregnant space, and a mere fleeting show of the whiteness, is a significant step towards our goal of integration of the spiritual and the material in our beings.

Thus in alchemy these two phases so fundamentally linked, were sometimes seen as the chaining of a toad and an eagle. The eagle of the spirit is held down by the earthly weight of the toad, while the earthly part of our being (the toad symbol) is lifted up towards the spirit. The hermetic philosopher Michael Maier incorporated this symbol into his coat of arms. The image of the earthly dragon bearing wings was sometimes used to express this same idea. If we can sense within our souls the need to link the spirit and the material, the spiritualising of the material and the materialising of the spirit, then we truly have made progress through the blackening to the stage of the whitening.

At this point the alchemists would often encounter the Peacock's Tail, a sudden appearance of a rush of colours, an iridescence on the surface of the material in the flask, which made some think they had achieved their goal. This could arise through the formation of a layer of oil on the surface of the watery mass (in the wet way) or some oxidation-reduction reactions, say on the surface of liquid metal (in the dry way). It was a fleeting show of colour changes, that pointed to the fact that one was on the right path, and reabsorbed the energies released in initial emergence of the polarities. It was a midway point of the process, which could be seen as a false conclusion. Many people who have this experience in their inner life often falsely assume they have reached the end of the work, and attained inner transformation and enlightenment. The inner vision of the Peacock's Tail, beautiful though it may be, is merely a digestion of the polarities of the black and white stage. These must be transformed further into spiritual tinctures, if we hope to have any permanent transformation within the soul.

Not all alchemists used the symbolism of the Peacock's Tail, and another stage often met at this point in the cycle was the meeting with the Green Lion. Physically the Green Lion was usually a name for vitriol, or the sulphuric acid created by distilling the green crystals of iron sulphate in a flask. Iron sulphate was formed when iron ores rich in sulphides were left to oxidise in the air, so was readily available to medieval alchemists. The sharp penetrating sulphuric acid could create major chemical changes in many materials even to the extent of dissolving metals like iron and copper. The Green Lion could also be the nitric acid formed from heating saltpeter or nitre and iron sulphate. Nitric acid when mixed with the acid derived from common salt, hydrochloric acid, produced aqua regia, a greenish tinged liquid that could dissolve even the noble metal gold. The Green Lion devouring the sun is a famous image in alchemy being depicted in many manuscripts and engravings, and can be thought of as aqua regia dissolving the solar gold and forming a solution which could readily tinge metals with gold.

To other alchemists who worked primarily with vegetable matter and processes, rather than the mineral work, the Green Lion was an image of the green raw energy of nature, "the green fuse which drives the flower" as Dylan Thomas elegantly expressed it in one of his poems. Here the Green Lion which devours the sun is the green pigment chlorophyll. The green leaves of the plant are formed out of the energy of sunlight. Alchemists often attempted to create living processes in their flasks and looked especially for precipitates or crystallisations which resembled leaves or plant forms. The Green Lion here could be a plant sap extract which was often the prima materia for their alchemical work. The Gryphon, half-eagle and half-lion, was sometimes associated with the end of this stage. The eagle nature of the Gryphon gave this hybrid being an ability to ascend in the flask, so it marked, in a sense, the spiritualisation of the Green Lion.

In the work with minerals, the metal antimony was referred to as the Grey Wolf, because when molten it greedily swallowed up many other metals, such as copper, tin and lead, by forming alloys. In this sense it behaved like metallic mercury which also readily amalgamated with metals. The Grey Wolf of antimony became especially important in early 17th century alchemy - its curative properties being popularised through the writings published under the name of Basil Valentine. To an extent it became an analogue for the work with minerals of the Green Lion of the work with plant substance.

After the Peacock's Tail or the greening of the Lion, alchemists looked for the appearance of a stage of whitening then a reddening in their flasks marking an new integration of the polarities which had emerged in the initial blackening and whitening and then been digested.

The white stage was the formation of the white tincture or stone, and was derived from though not to be confused with the earlier whitening which followed the calcination or putrefaction, for to have proceeded to this stage meant one was on a higher level of spiritual attainment. This was often pictured as the appearance of a queen dressed in shining white robes in the flask. The white tincture marked a process of inner change when the alchemist was able to experience and bring into an integrated harmony the feminine component of the soul. Often this sexual element is stressed in alchemy. The Rosarium Philosophorum, a key work of the mid 16th century, shows the coupling of the male and female as a central facet of the process. Regrettably, some 20th century commentators have sought to link this symbolism with the practice of so called 'sex-magic', in which people seek to use the sexual act as a basis for magical working. The alchemical manuscripts and books do not seem to support such an interpretation at all. The male and female copulating in the flask were for the alchemists symbols for aspect of our inner being uniting together.

They saw metals, plants and minerals as being masculine and feminine in some degree and projected the transformations of these in their retorts into their inner space, in order to explore their own masculine and feminine natures. Acids, for example, which could penetrate and dissolve metal ores, were seen as masculine. Substances exhibited a femininity when they were connected with the forces of growth and nourishment of processes in the flask and the melding of substances together into a new unity. Metallic Mercury was seen as hermaphrodite as it both dissolved and brought together other metals into an amalgam.

The White Stone was sometimes symbolised by the Unicorn, partly because of its white horn, but also because the Unicorn could only be tamed by the touch of a pure woman. Thus the White Tincture can only be experienced by purifying the feminine forces within our beings.

The reddening or formation of the Red Stone was pictured through the symbol of the Pelican. The white pelican bird with its long bill reaching down over its breast, was in medieval times mistakenly observed piercing its breast with its bill and feeding its young on its own blood. What actually happens is that the bird regurgitates food it has caught earlier and its young feed on this ground up fish, bits of which fall onto the breast of the pelican and it appears as if its breast is bleeding. This myth of the sacrificial act of the Pelican in feeding its young on its own blood, was more powerful than the prosaic reality and during medieval times the Pelican became a symbol for Christ's sacrifice of his blood. Alchemists also took this symbol aboard and readily incorporated it into their symbolic menagerie.

The reddening marked the formation of the Red Tincture, which transformed the masculine forces of the soul, ennobled them, and brought them into a new harmony and was often

symbolised by the appearance of a Red King in the flask. In our inner work, we begin to possess the red tincture when we have entered on the task of transforming the raw energies of the masculine component of our souls, sometimes pictured by the alchemists as a knight brandishing a sword, into a more creative force.

The tinctures in alchemy relate also to the substances of the Mass, the red wine, the blood, and the white wafer, the body of Christ. Administration of the Sacraments was seen as spiritualising the souls of the partakers. In alchemical terms these white and red stones or tinctures served much the same purpose, though the alchemists achieved this, not through the intermediacy of a priest but by their own inner work of transmutation. Here alchemy links directly with the Grail stories which use similar parallels between the Grail and the Sacraments. The red tincture was occasionally symbolised by a stag bearing antlers. The stag being seen as a noble masculine animal. This links in with the Unicorn as a symbol of the white or feminine tincture. In some alchemical illustrations, such as that of the late 16th century Book of Lambspring, the Stag and Unicorn meet in the forest of the soul as part of the process of inner transformation.

The final stage of the work was often symbolised by the Phoenix rising from the flames. This goes back to the Greek myth of the Phoenix bird which renewed itself every 500 years by immolating itself on a pyre. This is thus a kind of resurrection and was paralleled with the symbol of Christ rising from the tomb. In interior terms it marks the rebirth of the personality from out of the crucible of transformation. The alchemists in meditating on processes in their flasks threw themselves into a sea of strange experiences, and as they worked these within their meditations and sought to grasp the inner parallels and significance of each of the stages of the process they had embarked upon, in a sense they experienced an inner death and rebirth in attaining the Philosophers' Stone. This stone was

actually experienced as the formation of a solid ground within the shifting sea of their inner world. Once this solid ground in the soul was found, the alchemists were able to take hold of their lives in a creative way, they could root their personality on a solid foundation or ground of inner experience.

One symbol of the stone was that of the Ouroboros, the snake holding its tail. As we begin the work, we are all rather unformed (the 'Massa Confusa' or confused mass is a good image) and often victims at the mercy of the sway of polarities in the soul, psychic energies that constantly shift from one pole to another, from joy to despair, from overbearing positivity to deep melancholy and negativity, from light to dark, energy to inertia. Our consciousness naturally follows the cycle of wakefulness and sleep, reflecting the cycle of day and night and the Seasons in Nature. This duality becomes reflected in many of our inner experiences. The snake often was used as a symbol for duality - its long drawn out body separating the polarities of head and tail. Sometimes the figure of a winged dragon was used here in place of the snake, in order to close the circle with the dragon at the beginning of the work. When the snake or dragon seized its tail it united the polarities into a circle, a symbol to the alchemists for achieving solidity amongst the dualistic energies of the soul forces. The creation of the Philosophers' Stone, was the formation of solid inner ground upon which the alchemical philosophers could build their personalities, and experience the full potentiality of being human.

Thus alchemists could pursue their cycle of inner transformation as embarking on a journey in which they met with archetypal animal figures. The steps on their journey were paralleled in their experiments in their flasks, and the detailed images of processes of change were worked together with the animal archetypes of that stage into a mandala-like picture

which they used as the basis for their meditations." (Adam McLean, "Animal Symbolism in the Alchemical Tradition")

"The hermetic tradition has long been concerned with the relationship between the inner world of our consciousness and the outer world of nature, between the microcosm and the macrocosm, the below and the above, the material and the spiritual, the centric and the peripheral. The hermetic world view, held by such as Robert Fludd, pictured a great chain of being linking our inner spark of consciousness with all the facets of the Great World. There was a grand platonic metaphysical clockwork, as it were, through which our inner world was linked by means of a hierarchy of beings and planes to the highest unity of the Divine.

This view, though comforting, is philosophically unsound and the developments in thought since the early 17th century have made such a hermetic world view untenable and philosophically naive. It is impossible to try to argue the case for such an hermetic metaphysics with anyone who has had a philosophical training, for they will quickly and mercilessly reveal deep philosophical contradictions in this world view.

So do we now have to abandon such a beautiful and spiritual world view and adopt the prevailing reductionist materialist conception of the world which has become accepted in the intellectual tradition of the West?

I am not so sure. There still remains the problem of our consciousness and its relationship to our material form – the Mind/Brain problem. Behavioural psychologists such as Skinner tried to reduce this to one level - the material brain - by viewing the mental or consciousness events from the outside as being merely stimulus-response loops. This simplistic view works fine for basic reflex actions - "I itch therefore I scratch" - but dissolves

into absurdity when applied to any real act of the creative intellect or artistic imagination. Skinner's determinism collapses when confronted with trying to explain the creative source of our consciousness revealing itself in an artist at work or a mathematician discovering through his thinking a new property of an abstract mathematical system. The psychologists' attempts to reduce the mind/brain problem to a merely material one of neurophysiology obviously failed. The idea that consciousness is merely a secretion or manifestation of a complex net of electrical impulses working within the mass of cells in our brain, is now discredited. The advocates of this view are strongly motivated by a desire to reduce the world to one level, to get rid of the necessity for 'consciousness', 'mind' or 'spirit' as a real facet of the world.

This materialistic determinism in which everything in the world (including the phenomenon of consciousness) can be reduced to simple interactions on a physical/chemical level, belongs really to the nineteenth century scientific landscape. Nineteenth century science was founded upon a 'Newtonian Absolute Physics' which provided a description of the world as an interplay of forces obeying immutable laws and following a predetermined pattern. This is the 'billiard ball' view of the world - one in which, provided we are given the initial state of the system (the layout of the balls on the table, and the exact trajectory, momentum and other parameters of the cue ball, etc.), then theoretically the exact layout after each interaction can be precisely calculated to absolute precision. All could be reduced to the determinate interplay of matter obeying the immutable laws of physics. The concept of the 'spiritual' was unnecessary, even 'mind' was dispensable, and 'God' of course had no place in this scheme of things.

This comfortably solid 'Newtonian' world view of the materialists has however been entirely undermined by the new physics of the twentieth century, and in particular through

Quantum Theory. Physicists investigating the properties of sub-atomic matter, found that the deterministic Newtonian absolutism broke down at the foundation level of matter. An element of probability had to be introduced into the physicists' calculations, and each sub-atomic event was in itself inherently unpredictable - one could only ascribe a probability to the outcome. The simple billiard ball model collapsed at the sub-atomic level. For if the billiard table was intended as a picture of a small region of space on the atomic scale and each ball was to be a particle (an electron, proton, or neutron, etc.), then physicists came to realise that this model could not represent reality on that level. For in Quantum theory one could not define the position and momentum of a particle both at the same moment. As soon as we establish the parameters of motion of a body its position is uncertain and can only be described mathematically as a wave of probability. Our billiard table dissolved into a fluid ever-moving undulating surface, with each ball at one moment focussed to a point then at another dissolving and spreading itself out over an area of the space of the table. Trying to play billiards at this sub-atomic level was rather difficult.

In the Quantum picture of the world, each individual event cannot be determined exactly, but has to be described by a wave of probability. There is a kind of polarity between the position and energy of any particle in which they cannot be simultaneously determined. This was not a failing of experimental method but a property of the kinds of mathematical structures that physicists have to use to describe this realm of the world. The famous equation of Quantum theory embodying Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle is:

Planck's constant = (uncertainty in energy) x (uncertainty in position)

Thus if we try to fix the position of the particle (i.e. reduce the uncertainty in its position to a small factor) then as a consequence of this equation the uncertainty in the energy must

increase to balance this, and therefore we cannot find a value for the energy of the particle simultaneous with fixing its position. Planck's constant being very small means that these factors only become dominant on the extremely small scale, that is within the realm of the atom.

So we see that the Quantum picture of reality has at its foundation a non-deterministic view of the fundamental building blocks of matter. Of course, when dealing with large masses of particles these quantum indeterminacies effectively cancel each other out, and physicists can determine and predict the state of large systems. Obviously planets, suns, galaxies being composed of large numbers of particles do not exhibit any uncertainty in their position and energies, for when we look at such large aggregates as a totality, the total quantum uncertainties of the system reduces to zero, and in respect to their large scale properties can effectively be treated as deterministic systems.

Thus on the large scale we can effectively apply a deterministic physics, but when we wish to look in detail at the properties of the sub-atomic realm, lying at the root and foundation of our world, we must enter a domain of quantum uncertainties and find the neat ordered picture dissolving into a sea of ever flowing forces that we cannot tie down or set into fixed patterns.

Some people when faced with this picture of reality find comfort in dismissing the quantum world as having little to do with the 'real world' of appearances. We do not live within the sub-atomic level after all. However, it does spill out into our outer world. Most of the various electronic devices of the past decades rely on the quantum tunnelling effect in transistors and silicon chips. The revolution in quantum physics has begun to influence the life sciences, and biologists and botanists are beginning to come up against quantum events

as the basis of living systems, in the structure of complex molecules in the living tissues and membranes of cells for example. When we look at the blue of the sky we are looking at a phenomenon only recently understood through quantum theory.

Although the Quantum picture of reality might seem strange indeed, I believe the picture it presents of the foundations of the material world, the ever flowing sea of forces metamorphosing and interacting through the medium of 'virtual' or quantum messenger particles, has certain parallels with the nature of our consciousness.

I believe that if we try to examine the nature of our consciousness we will find at its basis it exhibits 'quantum' like qualities. Seen from a distant, large scale and external perspective, we seem to be able to structure our consciousness in an exact and precise way, articulating thoughts and linking them together into long chains of arguments and intricate structures. Our consciousness can build complex images through its activity and seems to have all the qualities of predictability and solidity. The consciousness of a talented architect is capable of designing and holding within itself an image of large solid structures such as great cathedrals or public buildings. A mathematician is capable of inwardly picturing an abstract mathematical system, deriving its properties from a set of axioms. A solo cellist is able to hold the whole musical structure of a Elgar's Cello Concerto or Bach's Cello Suites in his or her consciousness when preparing for a performance.

In this sense our consciousness might appear as an ordered and deterministic structure, capable of behaving like and being explicable in the same terms as other large scale structures in the world. However, this is not so. For if we through introspection try to examine the way in which we are conscious, in a sense to look at the atoms of our consciousness, this regular structure disappears. Our consciousness does not actually work

in such an ordered way. We only nurture an illusion if we try to hold to the view that our consciousness is at root an ordered deterministic structure. True, we can create the large scale designs of the architect, the abstract mathematical systems, a cello concerto, but anyone who has built such structures within their consciousness knows that this is not achieved by a linear deterministic route.

Our consciousness is at its root a maverick, ever moving, jumping from one perception, feeling, thought, to another. We can never hold it still or focus it at a point for long. Like the quantum nature of matter, the more we try to hold our consciousness to a fixed point, the greater the uncertainty in its energy will become. So when we focus and narrow our consciousness to a fixed centre, it is all the more likely to suddenly jump with a great rush of energy to some seemingly unrelated aspect of our inner life. We all have such experiences each moment of the day. As in our daily work we try to focus our mind upon some problem only to suddenly experience a shift to some other domain in ourselves, another image or emotional current intrudes then vanishes again, like an ephemeral virtual particle in quantum theory.

Those who begin to work upon their consciousness through some kinds of meditative exercises will experience these quantum uncertainties in the field of consciousness in a strong way.

In treating our consciousness as if it were a digital computer or deterministic machine after the model of 19th century science, I believe we foster a limited and false view of our inner world. We must now take the step towards a quantum view of consciousness, recognising that at its base and root our consciousness behaves like the ever flowing sea of the sub-atomic world. The ancient hermeticists pictured consciousness as the 'Inner Mercury'. Those

who have experienced the paradoxical way in which the metal Mercury is both dense and metallic and yet so elusive, flowing and breaking up into small globules, and just as easily coming together again, will see how perceptive the alchemists were of the inner nature of consciousness, in choosing this analogy. Educators who treat the consciousness of children as if it were a filing cabinet to be filled with ordered arrays of knowledge are hopelessly wrong.

We can I believe go a step further than this recognition of the quantum nature of consciousness, and see just how this overlays and links with the mind/brain problem. The great difficulties in developing a theory of the way in which consciousness/mind is embodied in the activity of the brain, has I believe arisen out of the erroneous attempt to press a deterministic view onto our brain activity. Skinner and the behaviourist psychologists attempted to picture the activity of the brain as a computer where each cell behaved as an input/output device or a complex flip/flop. They saw nerve cells with their axons (output fibres) and dendrites (input fibres) being linked together into complex networks. An electrical impulse travelling onto a dendrite made a cell 'fire' and send an impulse out along its axon so setting some other nerve cell into action. The resulting patterns of nerve impulses constituted a reflex action, an impulse to move a muscle, a thought, a feeling, an intuitive experience. All could be reduced to the behaviour of this web of axons and dendrites of the nerve cells.

This simplistic picture, of course, was insufficient to explain even the behaviour of creatures like worms with primitive nervous systems, and in recent years this approach has largely been abandoned as it is becoming recognised that these events on the membranes of nerve cells are often triggered by shifts in the energy levels of sub-atomic particles such as

electrons. In fact, at the root of such interactions lie quantum events, and the activity of the brain must now be seen as reflecting these quantum events.

The brain can no longer be seen as a vast piece of organic clockwork, but as a subtle device amplifying quantum events. If we trace a nerve impulse down to its root, there lies a quantum uncertainty, a sea of probability. So just how is it that this sea of probability can cast up such ordered structures and systems as the conception of a cello concerto or abstract mathematical entities? Perhaps here we may glimpse a way in which 'spirit' can return into our physics. The inner sea of quantum effects in our brain is in some way coupled to our ever flowing consciousness. When our consciousness focusses to a point, and we concentrate on some abstract problem or outer phenomenon, the physical events in our brain, the pattern of impulses, shifts in some ordered way. In a sense, the probability waves of a number of quantum systems in different parts of the brain, are brought into resonance, and our consciousness is able momentarily to create an ordered pattern that manifests physically through the brain. The thought, feeling, perception is momentarily earthed in physical reality, brought from the realm of the spiritually potential into outer actuality. This focussed ordering of the probability waves of many quantum systems requires an enormous amount of energy, but this can be borrowed in the quantum sense for a short instant of time. Thus we have through this quantum borrowing a virtual quantum state which is the physical embodiment of a thought, feeling, etc. However, as this can only be held for a short time, the quantum debt must be paid and the point of our consciousness is forced to jump to some other quantum state, perhaps in another region of the brain. Thus our thoughts are jumbled up with emotions, perceptions, fantasy images.

The central point within our consciousness, our 'spirit' in the hermetic sense, can now be seen as an entity that can work to control quantum probabilities. To our 'spirits' our brain is

a quantum sea providing a rich realm in which it can incarnate and manifest patterns down into the electrical/chemical impulses of the nervous system. (It has been calculated that the number of interconnections existing in our brains far exceeds the number of atoms in the whole universe - so in this sense the microcosm truly mirrors the macrocosm!). Our 'spirit' can through quantum borrowing momentarily press a certain order into this sea and this manifests as a thought, emotion, etc. Such an ordered state can only exist momentarily, before our spirit or point of consciousness is forced to jump and move to other regions of the brain, where at that moment the pattern of probability waves for the particles in these nerve cells, can reflect the form that our spirit is trying to work with.

This quantum borrowing to create regular patterns of probability waves is bought for a high price in that a degree of disorder must inevitably arise whenever the spirit tries to focus and reflect a linked sequential chain of patterns into the brain (such as we would experience as a logical train of thought or inward picture of some elaborate structure). Thus it is not surprising that our consciousness sometimes drifts and jumps about in a seemingly chaotic way. The quantum borrowing might also be behind our need for sleep and dream, allowing the physical brain to rid itself of the shadowy echoes of these patterns pressed into it during waking consciousness. Dreaming may be that point in a cycle where consciousness and its vehicle interpenetrate and flow together, allowing the patterns and waves of probability to appear without any attempt to focus them to a point. In dream and sleep we experience our point of consciousness dissolving, decoupling and defocussing.

The central point of our consciousness when actively thinking or feeling, must of necessity jump around the sea of patterns in our brain. (It is well known through neurophysiology that function cannot be located at a certain point in the brain, but that different areas and groups of nerve cells can take on a variety of different functions.) We all experience this

when in meditation we merely let our consciousness move as it will. Then we come to sense the elusive mercurial eternal movement of the point of our consciousness within our inner space. You will find it to be a powerful and convincing experience if you try in meditation to follow the point of your consciousness moving within the space of your skull. Many religious traditions teach methods for experiencing this inner point of spirit.

I believe the movement of this point of consciousness, which appears as a pattern of probability waves in the quantum sea, must occur in extremely short segments of time, of necessity shorter than the time an electron takes to move from one state to another within the molecular structure of the nerve cell membranes. We are thus dealing in time scales significantly less than 10 to the power -16 of a second and possibly down to 10 to the power -43 of a second. During such short periods of time, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle which lies at the basis of quantum theory, means that this central spark of consciousness can borrow a large amount of energy, which explains how it can bring a large degree of ordering into a pattern. Although our point of consciousness lives at this enormously fast speed, our brain which transforms this into a pattern of electro/chemical activity runs at a much slower rate. Between creating each pattern our spark of consciousness must wait almost a eternity for this to be manifested on the physical level. Perhaps this may account for the sense we all have sometimes of taking an enormous leap in consciousness, or travelling through vast realms of ideas, or flashes of images, in what is only a fleeting moment.

At around 10 to the power -43 of a second, time itself becomes quantised, that is it appears as discontinuous particles of time, for there is no way in which time can manifest in quantities less than 10 to the power -43 (the so called Planck time). For here the borrowed quantum energies distort the fabric of space turning it back upon itself. There time must

have a stop. At such short intervals the energies available are enormous enough to create virtual black holes and wormholes in space-time, and at this level we have only a sea of quantum probabilities - the so called Quantum Foam. Contemporary physics suggests that through these virtual wormholes in space-time there are links with all time past and future, and through the virtual black holes even with parallel universes. It must be somewhat above this level that our consciousness works, weaving probability waves into patterns and incarnating them in the receptive structure of our brains. Our being or spirit lives in this Quantum Foam, which is thus the Eternal Now, infinite in extent and a plenum of all possibilities. The patterns of everything that has been, that is now, and will come to be, exists latent in this quantum foam. Perhaps this is the realm though which the mystics stepped into timelessness, the eternal present, and sensed the omnipotence and omniscience of the spirit.

I believe that these exciting discoveries of modern physics could be the basis for a new view of consciousness and the way it is coupled to our physical nature in the brain. (Indeed, one of the fascinating aspects of Quantum theory which puzzles and mystifies contemporary physicists is the way in which their quantum description of matter requires that they recognise the consciousness of the observer as a factor in certain experiments. This enigma has caused not a few physicists to take an interest in spirituality especially inclining them to eastern traditions like Taoism or Buddhism, and in time I hope that perhaps even the hermetic traditions might prove worthy of their interest).

An important experiment carried out as recently as summer 1982 by the French physicist, Aspect, has unequivocally demonstrated the fact that physicists cannot get round the Uncertainty Principle and simultaneously determine the quantum states of particles, and confirmed that physicists cannot divorce the consciousness of the observer from the events

observed. This experiment (in disproving the separability of quantum measurements) has confirmed what Einstein, Bohr and Heisenberg were only able to philosophically debate over - that with quantum theory we have to leave behind our naive picture of reality as an intricate clockwork. We are challenged by quantum theory to build new ways in which to picture reality, a physics, moreover, in which consciousness plays a central role, in which the observer is inextricably interwoven in the fabric of reality.

In a sense it may now be possible to build a new model of quantum consciousness, compatible with contemporary physics and which allows a space for the inclusion of the hermetic idea of the spirit. It may well be that science has taken a long roundabout route through the reductionist determinism of the 19th century and returned to a more hermetic conception of our inner world.

In this short essay, incompletely argued though it may be, I hope I have at least presented some of the challenging ideas that lie behind the seeming negativity of our present age. For behind the hopelessness and despair of our times we stand on the brink of a great breakthrough to a new recognition of the vast spiritual depths which live within us all as human beings." (Adam McLean, "Quantum Consciousness")

"On the one energy of nothingness

'THE TAO PRODUCES ONE ENERGY FROM NOTHINGNESS, THEN FROM ONE ENERGY GIVES BIRTH TO YIN AND YANG. YIN AND YANG THEN COMBINE TO FORM THREE BODIES; THE THREE BODIES REPRODUCE, AND MYRIAD THINGS GROW.'

The Tao of essence and life is the Tao of creative evolution; the Tao of creative evolution is the Tao which produces and reproduces unceasingly. When we investigate the source of the Tao, we find it produces one energy from nothingness, and from the one energy produces heaven, produces earth, gives birth to yin and yang. Yin and yang recombine therein, and while containing the one energy produce three bodies. Once the three bodies are formed, the one energy goes into motion, from yin to yang, yang to yin; thus myriad things and beings are born.

So this is like the growth of plants and trees: first one sprout grows from the earth—this is one energy born from nothingness. Once the sprout has emerged from the ground, it opens into two leaves—this is producing yin and yang from one energy. Then a stem grows up from between the two leaves—this is yin and yang combining to form three bodies. From this branches and leaves grow—this is the three bodies reproducing so that myriad things grow.

Everything in the world, sentient or insentient, grows out of this one single energy of nothingness; but then all follow the course of creation. If practitioners of the Tao know about following the course of creation, they practice it in reverse, returning the myriad to three, returning the three to two, returning the two to one, returning the one to nothingness. Then that which is beyond the senses is reached...

The three realms are only mind

‘THE SUBTLE PRINCIPLE OF THE THREE REALMS AS ONLY MIND: MYRIAD THINGS ARE NOT THIS, NOT THAT; THERE IS NOT A THING THAT IS NOT MY MIND, THERE IS NOT A THING THAT IS MY SELF.’

The three realms are the realm of form, the realm of desire, and the realm of no form. The realms of form and desire are realms of mind, the realm of no form is the realm of mindlessness. Neither mind nor mindlessness is the essence of buddhahood. The title of the verse says the three realms are only mind, but what is to be called the true mind is the unminding mind which is neither existent nor nonexistent, in which neither being nor nonbeing stands, and things and self are all ultimately empty. In the mind of the true mind, myriad things are one body, without division into "this" and "that." "There is nothing that is not my mind" refers to not clinging to voidness; "there is nothing that is my self" refers to not sticking to forms. Not clinging to voidness, not sticking to forms, there is just one mind; one mind is one essence, mind is Buddha and Buddha is mind.

Seeing mind in things

'SEEING THINGS, YOU SEE THE MIND; WITHOUT THINGS, MIND DOES NOT APPEAR. IN THE TEN DIRECTIONS, OPEN OR BLOCKED, THE TRUE MIND IS OMNIPRESENT. IF YOU CONCEIVE INTELLECTUAL INTERPRETATION, IT TURNS INTO A FALSE VIEW. IF YOU CAN SEE OBJECTS WITHOUT MINDING, THEN YOU WILL SEE THE FACE OF ENLIGHTENMENT.'

"Seeing things, you see the mind; without things, mind does not appear" refers to the human mind with perception and cognition. "In the ten directions, open or blocked, the true mind is omnipresent" refers to the true mind without perception or cognition. The human mind arises and vanishes according to the presence or absence of things; the spiritual light of the true mind is always bright, the same whether there are things or not—everywhere is it. It neither arises nor vanishes, and cannot be assessed by the human mind with its limited faculties of perception and cognition; if you try to understand the true mind by the intellect, you are recognizing a thief as your child—a false view and a serious error.

The true mind is round and bright, naked and free, not divorced from objects yet not attached to objects. If people can see objects without minding, this is the true mind, this is the original face of enlightenment—there is no need to seek the original face of enlightenment anywhere else. In sum, when there is no human mind, only then can you see the true mind. Once the true mind is seen, you immediately realize enlightenment and suddenly transcend to the beyond.

Equalizing beings

'I AM NOT DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PEOPLE; PEOPLE'S MINDS ARE THEMSELVES DIFFERENT. FOR PEOPLE THERE ARE FRIENDS AND STRANGERS; FOR ME, NO "THAT" OR "THIS." CREATURES OF WATER, LAND, AND AIR, I VIEW EQUALLY AS ONE BODY; WHETHER PEOPLE ARE HIGH OR LOW IN RANK, THEIR HANDS AND FEET ARE THE SAME AS MINE. I AM NOT EVEN ME; HOW COULD THERE EVEN BE YOU? "THAT" AND "THIS" BOTH NONEXISTENT, MYRIAD BUBBLES RETURN TO WATER.'

The title of this verse is "Equalizing beings," which means equally seeing others and self, friends and strangers, fish, animals, and birds, people in high and low ranks, as one body alone. The important point of this verse is in the line "I am not even me." The reason people of the world cannot see beings as equal is because they are egotistic. If one can be selfless, how can one know there is a second person? With "you" and "me" both forgotten, myriad beings all empty, they are equal of themselves without being equalized.

Mind itself is Buddha

'BUDDHA IS MIND, MIND IS BUDDHA: "MIND" AND "BUDDHA" ARE BASICALLY ILLUSIONS. IF YOU KNOW THERE IS NO BUDDHA AND NO MIND, THIS AT LAST IS THE REAL BUDDHA OF TRUE SUCHNESS. THE REAL BUDDHA HAS NO LIKENESS; A SINGLE ROUND LIGHT ENGULFS MYRIAD FORMS. THE BODYLESS BODY IS THE REAL BODY; THE FORMLESS FORM IS THE TRUE FORM. NOT MATERIAL, NOT VOID, NOT NONVOID, NOT MOVING, NOT STILL, IT DOES NOT COME OR GO. NO DIFFERENCES, NO SAMENESS, NO BEING OR NONBEING, IT CANNOT BE GRASPED OR ABANDONED, CANNOT BE LISTENED TO OR LOOKED AT. INSIDE AND OUTSIDE ROUND AND BRIGHT, IT PERVADES EVERYWHERE: ONE BUDDHA-LAND IS IN A GRAIN OF SAND, ONE GRAIN OF SAND CONTAINS A UNIVERSE; ONE BODY AND MIND, TEN THOUSAND ARE THE SAME. KNOWING THIS, YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND THE PRINCIPLE OF UNMINDING: NOT BEING CONDITIONED OR OBSESSED IS PURE WORK, NOT DOING ANYTHING, GOOD OR BAD, IS PAYING HONOR TO KASYAPA.'

The important point of this verse is in the line, "Knowing this, you should understand the principle of unminding." Unminding does not mean ignorance; if it were ignorant unminding, it would be the same as a wood carving or clay statue—how could it be said mind is Buddha? Generally speaking, the meaning of unminding is simply not sticking to forms and not sticking to voidness.

The true mind has no substance or form; originally there is not a single thing in it, so what form could it have? The light of the true mind engulfs myriad things, all-pervasive without obstruction—how could it be void? Not form, not void, round and bright, clean and naked, mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind, yet neither is "mind" or "Buddha." Therefore it says "mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind," and it also says "mind and Buddha are basically illusions." If you perceive mind is Buddha, and also know it is neither mind nor Buddha, the principle of unminding can avoid falling into nihilism.

WHAT A LAUGH MY MIND IS—LIKE A DUNCE, LIKE A BUMPKIN, NOW UNMOVING, NOW EBULLIENT, CALMLY LETTING THINGS BE AS THEY MAY. I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO CULTIVATE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE, YET DO NOT DO ANYTHING WRONG. I HAVE NEVER HELPED OTHER PEOPLE, YET AM NOT SELF-SERVING EITHER. I DO NOT KEEP ANY RULES OF DISCIPLINE, NOR DO I FOLLOW TABOOS. I DO NOT KNOW RITUAL OR MUSIC, I DO NOT PRACTICE BENEVOLENCE AND DUTY. WHAT PEOPLE CAN DO I DO NOT UNDERSTAND AT ALL. WHEN HUNGRY, I EAT, WHEN THIRSTY, I DRINK, WHEN TIRED I SLEEP, WAKING, I ACT. WHEN IT'S HOT I DRESS LIGHTLY, WHEN COLD, I PUT ON MORE CLOTHES. WITHOUT THOUGHT OR RUMINATION, WHAT SORROW, WHAT JOY? NO REGRET, NO AMBITION, NO MEMORIES, NO IDEAS. THE UPS AND DOWNS OF ORDINARY LIFE ARE JUST INNS ON A JOURNEY. A TREE IN A FOREST WHERE BIRDS MAY PERCH ALSO CAN BE A SIMILE; IT DOES NOT TRY TO PREVENT THEIR COMING, AND DOES NOT TRY TO STOP THEM WHEN THEY LEAVE. NOT AVOIDING, NOT SEEKING, NO PRAISE, NO BLAME, I DO NOT DISLIKE UGLINESS OR ENVY BEAUTY. I DO NOT RUN FOR A QUIET ROOM, OR RUN AWAY FROM THE BUSTLING CITY. I DO NOT SPEAK OF OTHERS' WRONGS OR BOAST WHEN I AM RIGHT. I AM NOT SOLICITOUS OF THE HIGHLY PLACED, NOR DO I SLIGHT THE LOWLY OR THE YOUNG. FRIEND AND ENEMY, GREAT AND SMALL, INSIDE AND OUTSIDE, SADNESS AND HAPPINESS, GAIN AND LOSS, HONOR OR INSULT, DANGER OR EASE—MY MIND DOES NOT SEE DUALISTICALLY, BUT IS EQUANIMOUS, ALL THE SAME. IT DOES NOT LEAD TO FORTUNE, AND DOES NOT START CALAMITY; SENSING, IT RESPONDS, RETURNING, IT AGAIN ARISES. I DO NOT FEAR WEAPONS, I AM NOT SCARED OF WILD BEASTS. I REFER TO WHATEVER IS AT HAND WITHOUT BEING RESTRICTED BY NAMES. MY EYES DO NOT GO TO FORMS, SOUNDS DO NOT ENTER MY EARS. WHATEVER APPEARANCES THERE MAY BE ALL BELONG TO FALSITY. THE FORMS AND VOICES OF MEN AND WOMEN ARE NOT FIXED ENTITIES.

MINDLESS OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCES, I AM NOT INFLUENCED OR ATTACHED;
WANDERING FREELY, NOTHING CAN GET ME DOWN. THE SPHERE OF LIGHT OF INEFFABLE
AWARENESS SHINES THROUGHOUT, INSIDE AND OUT, ENFOLDING THE FOUR QUARTERS,
WITHOUT FAR OR NEAR. THE LIGHT IS NOT LIGHT—IT IS LIKE THE MOON IN THE WATER.
SINCE YOU CANNOT GRASP IT OR THROW IT OUT, HOW CAN YOU COMPARE IT TO
ANYTHING? WHEN YOU UNDERSTAND THIS SUBLIME FUNCTION, YOU TRANSCEND TO THE
BEYOND. IF ANYONE ASKS MY RELIGION, IT IS JUST THIS.

*This lengthy poem just illustrates unminding. The marvel is in unminding, by which one can be beyond the world while in the world, roaming freely, untrammelled by things. Not a particle of dust is to be admitted into people's hearts, for whenever there is any dust within, endless human mentality emerges. Once human mentality arises, one becomes capricious and loses autonomy and independence, taking the servant for the master and considering the master a servant. How then can one be free? If one can be totally unminding, imperturbable and unshakable, then one is independent. When independent, one is autonomous. Myriad ruminations cease, entanglements do not arise; the sphere of light of ineffable awareness is all-pervasive and all-embracing, without distinction of far or near. This is true attainment of freedom, the sublime function of unminding." (Selections from *Understanding Reality: A Taoist Alchemical Classic* by Chang Po-tuan with a concise commentary by Liu I-ming)*

"Besides the Emerald Tablet, the primary source for Hermetic philosophy is The Corpus Hermeticum. The many alchemical texts are really books of spiritual exercises or practice. (The Emerald Tablet is both).

Study of these texts reveals that the cosmos “is one mass of life, and there is not anything in the Cosmos that is not alive.” But the cosmos is not itself the source of life. The source of life is the Good, which (or who) is “immortal life.”

‘The Cosmos is an instrument of God's will, and it was made by Him to this end, that, having received from God the seeds of all things that belong to it, and keeping these seeds within itself, it might bring all things into actual existence. The Cosmos produces life in all things by its movement; and decomposing them, it renews the things that have been decomposed; for, like a good husbandman, it gives them renewal by sowing seed. There is nothing in which the Cosmos does not generate life; and it is both the place in which life is contained and the maker of life.’ (Corpus Hermeticum IX)

The Hermetic universe is alive and is a unity. Both life and unity arise out of a conjunction or identity of complements. A manuscript of ‘The Goldmaking of Kleopatra’ expresses the idea to perfection. A serpent with its tail in its mouth, the Ouroboros, encloses the motto “En to Pan,” One the All. Another ancient text states: “One is the All, and thanks to it the All, and by it the All, and if the All did not contain the All, the All would be nothing.” The circle is closed. The universe is a uni-verse; there is nothing else. It is one-only, non-exteriorized, and recursive: everything is connected to everything else. The Corpus Hermeticum (XVI) says: “If any one attempts to separate all things from the One, taking the term ‘all things’ to signify a mere plurality of things, and not a whole made up of things, he will sever the All from the One, and will thereby bring to naught the All.” Ostanes, too, in one of the earliest alchemical formulae, affirms: “Nature rejoices in Nature, Nature triumphs over Nature, Nature rules Nature.”

What is involved is not a theory, but an experience—the experience of a state of consciousness in which the opposition between subject and object, inside and outside, observer and observed, is transcended to reveal the spiritual unity and creative interdependence of humanity and the cosmos. The Hermetic universe, the Hermetic work, and the human subject are one and the same. “Everything is the product of one universal creative effort,” wrote Paracelsus. Hermes likewise teaches in the Asclepius, “The human being is all things; the human being is everywhere.” To know this is gnosis. It is to be born again: begotten by God and conceived in silence in a womb that is wisdom. Reborn in this way, one comes to perceive, “not with bodily eyesight, but by the working of mind”:

‘Father, now that I see in mind, I see myself to be the All. I am in Heaven and on Earth, in Water and in Air; I am in beasts and plants; I am a babe in the womb, and one that is not yet conceived, and one that has been born; I am present everywhere.’ (Corpus Hermeticum XIII)

If one would know God, one must become like God, such is this science. Only like may know like. Becoming like God to know God, one comes to know like God. The knowing with which one comes to know God is only the knowing with which God knows. And as all things are in God, so they must also be in the human being and become conscious. But where? Since things are not in God as in a place, or space, corporeally, but rather invisibly, beyond space and time, the human being must withdraw from space and time, matter and motion, desire and memory. Outside space and time, consciousness is all. With each thought, we are there. There is only the present.

To realize this vision requires a radical transformation of consciousness or perception, a change in the way we know and perceive, “for all things which the eye can see are mere

phantoms and unsubstantial outlines; but the things which the eye cannot see are the realities."

What is implied then is a schooling of the senses—a cleansing of "the doors of perception," so that, instead of being "stuffed up with the gross mass of matter" and "crammed with loathly pleasures," they may become active organs of true vision. Once this is achieved, one may "see with the heart Him whose will it is that with the heart alone He should be seen." Later students of the tradition like Paracelsus will term this faculty Imaginatio Vera: True Imagination, the Star in the Human Being.

"True imagination," writes Maurice Aniane in an extremely perceptive essay on alchemy, "actually 'sees' the 'subtle' processes of nature and their angelic prototypes. It is the capacity to reproduce in oneself the cosmogenic unfolding, the permanent creation of the world in the sense in which all creation, finally, is only a Divine Imagination."

To understand this, one must go beyond the idea of a single, unique act of creation and assume as well a "creative state" of continuous creation, metaphysical in nature, outside space and time. Creation is continuously unfolding, and consciousness may always know its states by virtue of the principle whereby "the One is the All." Hermetically, to know a god is to penetrate to a specific creative phase or relationship. As Hortulanus says, "Our Stone is made in the same way that the world is created." The world is not continuous as our senses present it to us. There are moments of eternity, gaps or openings in perception, which our senses conceal. For the Hermetist, it is by means of these "gaps" that causality—out of time—is effected by the gods who are themselves the "causes." Causality is vertical, for in the realm of phenomena—the horizontal plane—there are only connections without cause.

Alchemy is thus religion under the sign of cosmology. More than that, it is experimental religion—a path of the empirical realization. Simply put, it is the sacred science of the realization and enhancement of the subtle states of the human being and the universe, inner and outer, where these are seen as not-two/not-one— unified, reflecting each other, corresponding to each other at each point, perhaps distinguishable, but certainly not separable—just as subject and object, knower and known are inseparably one in the non-dual state which is the source of both. Thus, there is an axis of non-dual light that unites the universe and connects the human being and nature with the source of all.

Though there sometimes seem to be two alchemical or Hermetic paths—one mystical and inner, and the other practical, empirical, and laboratory-based—there is really only one, which is mystical and inner and practical, empirical and outer.

Uniting inner and outer, the alchemist becomes a universal priest celebrating a Eucharistic transubstantiation, whose species are not just bread and wine, but nature in its entirety.

To achieve this transubstantiation, the alchemist imposes nothing, but only “follows nature in her mode of operation.” The rest is a gift of God, a donum dei: grace.

From this point of view, Alchemy is at once phenomenological or empirical and religious. Empirical, it is experimental and scientific. Religious, it is an initiatory path of prayer.

Phenomenologically, it starts with the unity of existence or matter and consciousness and with the unity of all phenomena of consciousness— consciousness always identifying consciousness.

If you would know the rose, become the rose. Become the rock. Become the plant. Become the metal.

From this point of view, nature or phenomena, through the commonplace, gives all the answers. Each event in identifying consciousness is its own answer. There is no beyond or outside.

What this means is that everything is a symbol.

All phenomena are symbols. They are the necessary representations of the knowledge they contain—the knowledge being that which makes them what they are, the principle according to which they function. Each thing in nature—bird, tree, and flower—is a question containing its own potential answer, meaning, and explanation. All phenomena—light, color, sound—and all natural processes—germination, growth, digestion, and fermentation—contain the power to evoke, in the prepared observer the true response that is their meaning. This Hermetic doctrine of the reciprocity of human being and world is well represented by Goethe when he writes:

‘One knows oneself only insofar as one knows the world, becoming aware of it only within oneself, and of oneself only within it. Each new subject, well observed, opens up within us a new organ of thought.’

In this philosophy lies the foundation of a true science of phenomena, a science of the commonplace, essentially dispensing with all instrumentation and relying on consciousness alone—for consciousness is everything. Goethe says:

'The best of all would be to realize that every fact is already theory. The blue of the sky shows us the principles of color. We need not look for anything behind phenomena: they themselves are the doctrine.'

Hermetic science is able to understand such phenomena as life, light, space, time, matter—which modern science cannot fathom—because it is able to experience phenomena as such, as God Himself knows them.

The symbol is what it symbolizes. It doesn't stand for anything, but is the living presence of what it symbolizes. For the alchemist, the universe, nature, every phenomenon is a concrete presence of the powers that govern it. The Hermetic art of alchemy is then the raising of the symbol into its living angelic archetype. But this is not just an inner act; it is a reality. The alchemist sees with the eyes of the Spirit—eyes of Fire—and confirms his theory through higher perception or Imagination. Paracelsus calls it True Imagination, for it "sees," that is, confirms, verifies, and collaborates in the "subtle" processes of nature, which are the continuous creation of the world: the Divine Imagination.

Hermetic science is thus a discipline of mind and body. Rather than the objectification and control of the known by the knower, it seeks unification and identity—thereby transforming the knower and the known as perceived and experienced. The "object" is conceived of as a symbol. Everything observable is a symbol. Every symbol is observable. But note that a symbol or phenomenon, though observable, is not "repeatable" in the sense that ordinary science depends upon repeatability. Each observation or empirical confirmation is unique, single: an act of grace manifesting in the confluence of the right gesture at the right moment. Hermetic science strives for a qualitative, unifying exaltation of the relation of the knower to the known in the symbol through the act of knowing. Hermetically, knowledge

and evolution are one, founded on the primacy of humanity as life and consciousness. Hermetists, finding themselves in a sense-based, psychological consciousness of multiplicity—that separates—and bearing within themselves the memory of original unity, are called upon to transform the one by the other.

Hermetic science is the way and contemplation of this process. Methodologically, it is a way of posing and articulating this unity, for unless each perception or act unifies, “things” (the consciousness that separates) cannot be seen as symbols.

The assumption of Hermetic science, then, is that the whole universe is sacramental, embodying and proclaiming the process of the revelation of unity—of unity as identity, however, rather than as non-duality. This unitary vision, subscribed to by all the great traditional men and women of “knowledge” is founded not upon a sensory material unity of nature, but on a spiritual unity.

This Unity was called the Prime Matter. It is not sensory matter, but is the water of life, the unmediated Divine Presence as the feminine element in nature, even the Holy Spirit.

Following the thinking of the twentieth century French alchemist, Henri Coton Alvar, let us briefly consider this Mystery.

First, there is the Mystery that the world is: the mystery of being.

Second, there is the Mystery of Movement, Metamorphosis, or Manifestation: not only “outwardly” in space and time (which movement creates), but also “inwardly,” so that everything is born, grows, and dies, i.e. evolves, transforms. No thing, no form is permanent.

How does movement arise? For the Hermetist movement arises as being encounters resistance, non-being. Between the two—between one and two—consciousness arises: a relationship.

Third, there is the Mystery of Intelligence. Movement is not disordered or chaotic. It is ordered metamorphosis. Everything moves, transforms, according to a rule—whether a falling body, the courses of the stars, or the growth of a plant. All follow a single rule or pattern of metamorphosis. This is the “pattern that connects” in Gregory Bateson's phrase: the thinking that is nature or the cosmos, which our ordinary consciousness granulates into bits and pieces in time and space. This third Mystery is the Mediator, the human function: Gnosis, which is life and light.

Thus the world is (1) substantial in its being; (2) consciousness in its movement or metamorphosis; (3) intelligent, knowable, by its organization. In other words, the macrocosmic world of nature and the universe—like the microcosmic world—is simultaneously body, soul, and spirit.

Corpus Mundi: the body of the world; the first matter of all things—which is the initial state of the cycle of modifications that metamorphosis will impose.

Anima Mundi: the soul of the world; the eternally active agent that makes things live and die, transforming all things without ceasing.

Spiritus Mundi: the intelligence at work in all things.

Working with these principles—which are the principles of creation as they are of the human being—the alchemist practices a spiritual discipline that allows him to participate in the world process. To do so is the Great Work. It is called the Great Work because it works to bring creation to its natural perfection, just as a gardener does in the garden or a cook in the kitchen. Thus the alchemist is a kind of gardener, or cook. He or she (or, often he and she) is also a kind of doctor. In other words, this is a very practical wisdom. It heals.

As doctor, the alchemist works to heal creation because, from the alchemical perspective, nature is “sick.” It contains in it a principle hostile to it. This principle, the cause of the “fall,” is still active, causing the dramatic mixture of life and death, wisdom and folly, renewal and decay that we see wherever we turn. One can neither deny the sickness that has penetrated creation, nor the marvellous solicitude that preserves it. All the natural kingdoms are sick; yet they perpetually renew themselves. Everywhere poison and remedy are in conflict—in our time, more so than ever.

The guiding principle of alchemy is the efficacious, curative, and omnipotent intervention of Unity—that is, Spirit—to overcome the pathology of the world, its death principle.

To do so, the alchemist works with the perpetual movement of the transformation of the Original Light of the world, which makes the seed germinate, grow, transmute food, and make new seeds. He works with the agent metamorphosis, which is the dance of spirit and substance, to enhance Life. As he studies the agent, he learns its rhythm.

This is a key, for rhythm, which is time, is metamorphosis and manifests the continually resurrecting power of the spirit.

The alchemist understands rhythm as the distance between seed and fruit. Such metamorphosis is not a simple succession of stages, or addition of parts, where you can see where one begins and another ends. It is the fulfillment of an end desired from the beginning: the end implied in the beginning. It is a whole. As such, it is outside ordinary time, which unfolds sequentially by placing one thing after another. Rhythmic metamorphosis is time as genesis. The phases of any such cycle of genesis constitute movement, life. The whole is Life itself. That is to say, the alchemist looks at all things as a cosmic biologist, for everything lives, which is from Heaven, a continuous and gratuitous gift of Spirit. Nothing is static. Everything forms a cycle of ordered spiritual metamorphosis: seven stages, four states, the cycle of the four elements—Earth, Air, Water, and Fire—applicable to all things.

Above all, the alchemist seeks in all things the healing, saving Ferment, the internal spiritualizing agent that underlines all transitory, discontinuous phenomena, the source of the metamorphosis of the four elements. This Ferment is a “fifth element.” It is the Quintessence, the permanent ferment in all things—in metals, minerals, plants, and animals, in the waters, the atmosphere, in cosmic light and space. Universally present, it would act unhindered according to its place or milieu—following the inspiration of the Spirit, which guides it—were it not for the “hostile” principle. The alchemist, God's right hand, seeks to overcome this pathology to enable the unrestricted flow of spirit through the world in all living things: minerals, plants, animals, and humans.

Much of alchemy can sound arcane, obscure to the point of incomprehensibility. The alchemical masters have their own language, which they use in a different way than we are used to. Our language, based as it is on a dualistic worldview, is denotative. Words have fixed meanings and appear to point to things. Alchemical language is connotative,

contextual. It is its own reality. You have to understand the context to understand the meaning of individual words—whose meaning can vary considerably according to context. Double and triple meanings abound. The texts are full of wordplay and puns. Often the very obscurity can tempt us to give up. Yet we need this tradition. Our Earth and our humanity need it. For it teaches us the way to fulfill our human, earthly task as mediators, pontiffs, between Heaven and Earth. It is the path of ultimate service: to aid the divine powers in the task of true world evolution.” (Christopher Bamford, “One The All: Alchemy as Sacred Ecology” in *Green Hermeticism*)

I hope the readings above have appropriately forced you, the reader, to ask something along the lines of *what the fuck?* One idea in using them (and the broadly alchemical theme running through most of them) was to get the reader to exactly “think differently” and to have some appreciation for a different view of the world and, indeed, the entire cosmos, the universe, the ultimate context in which any and every life is set. This is how fundamental I imagine the subject of ANARCHY to be and how thorough we need to be in our changing consciousness. I am saying, both very alchemically and very hermetically, as is appropriate to my theme and sources here, that we need to work in and through ourselves an act of transformation that mirrors nature’s own transformative nature: “As above, so below”, as Hermes Trismegistus is reputed to have suggested on his Emerald Tablet to which my last author referred. The microscopic and the macroscopic are fundamentally related and each takes part in the other as they are one. Of course, you are free to dispute all this. But this will require you doing the thinking I have been doing for yourself and then writing your own book. I encourage you to do that most sincerely.

However, before I can continue on with the rest of my book – which is eventually to become my thoughts on how we might “change consciousness” and transform ourselves

in what I regard as five key areas – Green, Queer, Erotic, Love and Magic – which are really one, I want to write my own notes to the excerpted readings I used above. I could have done this after each reading, of course. Then the reader would have received my guidance on how to read what was there according to some imagined scheme of thought this book is proposing. But I didn't want to do that even if the method chosen instead is slightly more cumbersome. Instead, you, the reader, have been exposed to the bare excerpted text first and only now shall I give some ideas as to where such thoughts lead me. This method, it is hoped, has led you to have your own thoughts as you read which must now be compared by you, the reader, to mine as you read them. There is method in the madness. What you come up with at the end will be up to you – AS IT ALWAYS IS.

And so to the first of the stories I excerpted, a story about the nature of the universe and the seeming inadequacies of the standard "lambda cold dark matter" model of the universe as compared to the newer approach of "timescape cosmology". The latter here sounds almost exactly like an actual episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (which I believe was actually called "Timescape" – season 6, episode 25) in which Picard and some of his senior staff members (Jordi, Troi and Data) are returning to the Enterprise from a conference in a shuttle. But as they near the ship they start experiencing strange effects. Some fruit in a bowl has suddenly gone rotten. Crew members experience moments where everyone seems to freeze. Upon making it back to the Enterprise they find it frozen in time in the midst, seemingly, of a battle with a Romulan Warbird. What has in fact happened, according to the explanation given in the show, is that space-time has been fractured in this locality so that pockets of time are moving at different rates and even in different directions. The Enterprise is not precisely frozen in time. Time is just moving infinitely slowly compared to how it is usually experienced. The "timescape cosmology" discussed in my first excerpt sounds pretty much exactly the same story as

this – except its being applied to our material universe for real with all the consequences that may entail.

What strikes me here in the way the article talking about this is written is how it talks about “explaining” the universe and what “is” or “isn’t” the case but whilst basically acknowledging that all that is really being done in its talk of invented things like “dark matter” or “dark energy” on the standard cosmology is that *a story is being invented to fit imagined observations*. Timescape cosmology is being suggested in the article by the researchers reported upon because it is imagined to be a better story to explain imagined observed fixed points which function in relation to the scientific values which manipulate them as things in need of connection and relation. So the notion of a universe full of different pockets or regions of space-time is being said to make better sense than the idea of the invented items dark matter and dark energy, items which only existed in the lambda cold dark matter story in the first place because that story seemed to necessitate them. Yet in none of this activity did we get out of being implicated in the use of our senses and reason as we felt a need to tell a connective story about the relations of things. However, as can be seen in this example, if you change the story then you change the universe.

I would then argue that this is not so much a matter of an “explanation” or an indicative is/isn’t so much as a “making sense”, a sense we imagine and create ourselves. What is happening is that the imagination is being engaged to conjure “an explanation”, a thing which functions in our logic to satisfy felt intellectual needs. Some people, in my view foolishly, would hope to find a “final answer” one day by this method. (In one of the essays I read when discussing Hakim Bey, above, Stephen Hawking was presented as such a person.) Others would suggest that this “looking for a better story” approach must

simply go on for as long as there are people to imagine one who can find reasons to want to create one. For if you need to create stories then all you will ever do is beget more stories. Your universe is found to be made of stories. And couldn't appear to function without them.

My second excerpt was snippets from Alan and Steve Moore's *Moon and Serpent Bumper Book of Magic* – and specifically from the parts which discuss a practical approach to what they think of as “magic” (which includes all creative art and arts including writing and music but also science); that is, ways they imagine that you can, in your own home, go about practicing magic or being a magician. It must be pointed out here immediately that this is imagined by the two Moores as a fundamentally imaginative business about “consciousness” carried out in a reality both material and immaterial. The imagination, they contend (or “consciousness” if you prefer), is a real thing and so “imagination” and “the imaginary” are both kinds of the real rather than kinds of the unreal. In fact, in order to sidestep the possibly sceptical overtones that the term “magic” might invoke, I think of their book not as one about “magic” (although that's exactly what it is about) but rather as being about what I have termed “imagination studies”. Magic, as the Moores discuss it, is really the opportunity to, and possibility of, exercising and broadening your imagination (or your consciousness) until you realise it can be so much more (and so much more useful) than you thought it was. You also learn that it can be trained and expanded – should you have the courage, dedication and commitment necessary to do so.

So “magic” is really only “use of the imagination” and it consequently gives a priority to the imagination and to consciousness that in some other places (perhaps where a purely materialist “objectivity” is overly sacralised or revered) is either lost or overlooked. So in the *Bumper Book* we find injunctions to “create a magic universe” (which means “use your

imagination"). The authors talk about our collective ability to imagine things "out of nothing" by means of the imaginal practices they teach. (Art, or "The Art", as creation.) They suggest that everything we experience is a matter of imaginative perception and so that there is nothing unimagined. In our linguistic natures they suggest that how we do things with words can create, destroy and recreate. (This is why magic has so much to do with spelling and grammar – spells and grimoires.) Within one imaginal system they discuss and explain, Kabbalah, they point out that one of the sephira on the Tree of Life is reserved for dreams and the imagination – the ninth sephira of Yesod. Yesod is a Hebrew word which means "foundation", suggesting that our imaginal world is something foundational for us (at least in this imaginal scheme) above our bare, material existence.

This is a point worth dwelling on in line with other things Alan and Steve Moore say. For example, they point out that the imagination and reality are not opposites. In fact, if you think about it, they become things impossible to separate for they are co-dependent, inextricably entwined. They are in a symbiotic relationship, each feeding the other. At various points throughout the *Bumper Book* it is suggested that the idea of a thing *is the thing*. (Most often this is claimed of supernatural or extraordinary things like gods or supposed spiritual beings but this is only to use an extreme to illustrate a point. It could apply to anything if being imagined is what counts). The main take away from this claim is that reality is not, and cannot, be merely material. When you think or imagine or have consciousness of something (which, as a thought or idea or even a feeling, is not reducible to material things) that is still really happening. It is real. And so is the wholly imaginary world it is set in. If you have a dream whilst asleep, that really occurred. The story and images are real (if imaginary). In other words, there is an immaterial realm which is just as real (whilst being different) as the material one. Reducing everything to material (and so

to material explanations) is then seen to be precisely an unnecessary act of reduction, a forced shrinking of reality to fit within one particular product of imagination (ironically enough), an imaginative and conceptual manipulation in itself.

Alan and Steve Moore take the view in my excerpts from their book that “consciousness” – which exists (something not all assume or believe) – may be an emergent property of complex networks, an idea I have heard discussed before by the American cognitive scientist, Christof Koch. Koch is known for his view that consciousness arises within any sufficiently complex information-processing system. All animals, on this argument, from humans on down to earthworms, are conscious; even the internet could potentially be conscious should a necessary threshold of complexity be achieved. This is, in fact, a modern and scientific version of what was called “panpsychism”, the notion that all things have souls or consciousness or “minds”. It subscribes to this view, however, not out of religious fervour or dogma but as a result of scientific premises. This, whether in Koch’s or the Moores’ terms, posits consciousness as a naturally occurring phenomenon not limited to special beings. Yet it does also pose the question of what consciousness is and in which realms it may be present. One thing seems clear though: consciousness affects the world and that seems obviously true whether we are talking about thinking, feeling or simply self-awareness. All affect behaviour and so action. Consciousness, and the activity within it called imagination, can change things – even if only with ourselves. But if you change even one thing then you change that one thing’s relation to the whole as well. If that whole should be more consequent on what we can imagine than some have previously thought, then this is a very important and consequential realisation.

One of the later excerpts I quoted from the *Bumper Book* talked about existence and whatever we imagine “existence” to be. This cannot simply be a material existence for

Batman exists (as I'm sure no one really doubts – not least the DC execs getting large checks because of that fact) – yet he also doesn't exist, for Batman is an imagined character in an imaginary universe. Here the Moores once more heavily suggest that “being imagined” is enough to qualify for existence in a way that, once more, suggests a dual material/immaterial reality. In fact, they argue that, inasmuch as ANY character, thing or relationship is imagined, anything, whether based on something or someone you could touch, an ancient deity from some culture that actually existed, or a thoroughly modern fictional character like Batman or one of the many invented by Alan Moore himself, is equally worthy of being imagined to exist (even if only in an imaginary, but still real, realm). Existence then seems to come to be a category of existing in some consciousness somewhere as an idea form or aspect of a relation of some kind. This, in turn, at least suggests the pregnant possibility that the universe itself may be a complex network that is itself a consciousness and that everything in it is its imagination. This would surely be a stern rebuke to those of our species who imagine the universe is largely just something dead. Ideas can change the world – but is that because everything is made of ideas?

I move on now to a couple of pieces by Adam McLean which I quoted above in full. The first of these essays addresses alchemy specifically, especially in relation to its animal symbolism or even just in relation to symbolism specifically. Alchemy, of course, might itself be (simplistically) understood as the chemistry of taking a base substance (usually a type of metal) and turning it into something of much more value (usually this would be gold). There were certainly alchemists in history who did this (or tried to do it, the world not being full of incredibly rich alchemists) but Adam McLean reveals alchemy to in fact be a far more involved and imaginative business than the bare chemical achievements attempted might suggest. McLean in fact understands alchemy, as he suggests many of its actually historical practitioners did, as a physical and spiritual process, a matter of the

material and the immaterial. This, so it is argued, is not least because alchemy was fully entwined within Hermetic notions of reality which made nature a physical/spiritual place full of meaning. The natural world, as a result, constantly provided symbols by which to understand the imagined alchemical processes and the stages of its chemical advancement from base substance to valuable and transmuted conclusion. In the process, and as a part of a natural world stuffed with symbolic meaning, more would change than the mere contents of an alchemist's flask. Alchemy would then become as much a matter of the symbolic imaginings of the alchemist as it would of the chemistry taking place in those self-same flasks.

This leads McLean to briefly divert into the mention of C.G. Jung and the "collective unconscious", a way in which Jung used the metaphor of alchemy to discuss the human mind. Jung thus imagines the mind itself as a kind of "inner nature" as parallel to the "outer nature" the alchemists worked with and his psychology is replete with all kinds of symbolisms and their suggested meanings as relations to the patient themselves. This itself is a "spiritualisation" of the human being and their consciousness whole and entire in much the same way as McLean is saying the alchemists practised their alchemy. In both cases, what is taking place in the "flask" (be that the alchemist's or the human mind) is given meanings and consciously related to them. In this way, both alchemy and consciousness both come to be seen as matters of phenomena and their relations – and so a grand "spiritualising" of earthly substance takes place which refuses the notion that the material is merely dead matter. McLean basically argues, in fact, that alchemy is that art which produces something from nothing and that, in and through its symbols, what is going on is explained. Alchemy, in fact, is transformation and the whole point (and so meaning) of the entire alchemical art is that lasting change be achieved in an arena, nature, where change and transformation themselves are permanently ongoing

processes. The metals and chemical processes involved in alchemy then act as physical symbols of the imaginary and meaningful aims to be achieved. So there is this constant back and forth between the physical and the spiritual, the outer and the inner, the phenomena and their meaning. More is being changed than one substance in a flask into another. The alchemist is being changed. The world is being changed.

A different subject is broached in McLean's second essay that I used but it comes to be related. The subject here is consciousness and Quantum Theory. However, in a broadly Hermetic overarching frame of reference, we are still moving in and amongst the same ideas. In this essay McLean wants to openly discuss relationships between things, be they consciousness and nature, what is within us and what is without us or "above and below" – to use expressly Hermetic vocabulary. This is given human shape in the so-called "mind/body problem" which McLean typifies as a consciousness problem, that problem being that we are not just matter subject to physical laws – we think, we feel, we have beliefs, we imagine. And we have absolutely no clue how – even if we can imagine the why as being a matter of utility. Why having a mind and a body together is a "problem" is because it puts a great dirty boot print on top of the large fly in the ointment of a scientific materialism which imagines the world as a giant mechanical construction (like clockwork). This imaginary of the universe stipulates that if we know enough about this grand mechanical system (as Nietzsche, for example, imagines in section 106 of *Human, All Too Human*) then, eventually, we will be able to figure out how everything works and then all of material reality will be in our grasp. (Nietzsche utilises this thinking to counter what he imagines is the foolish mistake of believing we have "free will".) So it is a problem because consciousness, mind, imagination, is not reducible to material. It fucks our cold, hard, calculable universe up.

Now it so happens, as McLean reports in this second essay, that Quantum Theory (and what is happening in the quantum realm) does the same thing. For when we apply our “normal physics” and mathematics to the quantum realm that realm does not comply with it. Normal physics and mathematics just doesn’t work in the quantum realm. The story these things imagine to tell makes no sense in quantum terms. And it doesn’t work much like a world of pure dead matter doesn’t work in the imagination or consciousness. In both the imagination and in the quantum realm things are indeterminate and unpredictable, not like clockwork or a regularised mechanism at all. Of course, it might be asked here why the physical world, either in our heads or in a quantum realm, should be forced to comply with our mechanistic schemes in the first place. I can’t think of a reason bar the arrogance of a certain type of thinking. This does, however, pose the question of the relation of the micro to the macro, the quantum to normal physics, the mind to the body (and ultimately the universe).

The situation we find ourselves in, so McLean suggests, is that that which is predictable, controllable and determined (large systems) comes to be based upon microscopic phenomena which are not. In fact, the implication is that without those microscopic things escaping determination then the greater things they are a part of could not be what they appear to be. Reality appears to rely on things escaping their determination! Every bee hive requires the freedom of each bee, every ant hill requires the freedom of each ant, every universe the freedom and indetermination of each sub-atomic, quantum event, every consciousness the random movement of thought. And so McLean develops the notion that as thought, feeling, belief and imagination are to consciousness, so is the quantum realm to the realm of ordinary physics and mathematics. This then pictures imagination as rising up, unpredictable and indeterminate, from a sea of internal quantum events. And isn’t this how we experience it? Is our consciousness “predictable”?

Do you never surprise yourself about how you think or feel, never have ideas come into your head and ask yourself, "Why did I imagine that?" McLean's suggestion here is that this is perhaps necessary in the function of such things – and in a way entirely compatible with the Hermetic slogan "As above, so below". For here consciousness is to human beings as matter is to the universe; the predictable relies on the unpredictable, the controllable on the uncontrollable, the calculable on the incalculable. This all ends up suggesting a question to me: does meaningful action require a necessarily volatile freedom? If it does, this would not just be merely a freedom of things but also a freedom of relations.

The next piece I referred to was of Chinese origin and came from the text *Understanding Reality* which is highly influenced by Daoist thought. The sections I excerpted are a quick and dirty introduction to the Daoist idea of "mind" which we may also imagine as consciousness. In this mentality, as can be plainly seen from the two levels of the text included, the original and its later interpretation by an adept, we are dealing with a conception of reality as a whole. This begins with "The Dao" which simply means "the way" and refers to nothing specifically physical. It does, however, give birth to it. Don't ask how that can be for that is merely to think physically about that which is not. The Dao is nothing. But it is also everything. It produces, first, energy, impetus and then balancing forces (yin and yang) which are present in everything and this leads to "creative evolution" in a world imagined constantly and consistently transformative that is fundamentally about balancing forces. There is "The Way" then nothing then energy then creation. This is the nature of things.

But wait. "There is not a thing that is not my mind." How to interpret this? We could choose several paths. One aspect here is that the mind easily creates illusions which are

impositions upon reality. "Mind" is "things" and "things" come from "mind". But this is less than ideal for this is the fabrication of a world and the imposition of false, non-existent boundaries. The world is not what you think it is. It is other than what you think it is. It evades what you think it is, coming, as it does, from the way. Here is introduced the concept of "mindlessness" which sounds crazy in English-speaking ears. It means "unminding" or "not-minding" which, in turn, means "having a mind that does not mind". It is about getting away from the mind that creates the illusion of "things", the fabricated and artificial universe. So "there is not a thing that is not my mind" because the world of mind is the world of fabricated things artificially related to each other. And that is illusion. The fact is that mind and reality interpenetrate in an inseparable way. There is no reality without mind and there is no mind without reality. The issue is how we navigate this interpenetration by means of mind for our pictures of the world, our imaginings of it, are not the world or its workings. The world is not made of "things". There are no "things". There is just world out of which the mind all too easily creates inequalities and false relations.

Understanding Reality tends to suggest here that there is no form and no void – and that words, our means of communication and understanding, only get in the way. For example, it is the noun form of language which deceives us into thinking that there are "things" since the purpose of nouns is precisely to denominate things and assign them their "thinghood". But is the world or the universe constructed by words in order to conform to them? Of course not. We imagined that into existence. The universe as it becomes just becomes in silence, without denomination, without names and also without set relationships. The universe is constant transformation (like weather) rather than a mechanism (like a clock). So if our mind wants to make it like a clock there is a problem for that is an illusion and an imposition. The solution is "the mind of no-mind" which is a mind

that lets reality become, or come and go, as it pleases in what one modern interpreter calls “the seashore mind”. The idea here is simple: your mind is the seashore. Reality will wash over it constantly and sometimes deposit things. But we should not cling onto them. Eventually, the tide of reality will wash them away again – and we should let them go. The way to achieve the balanced peace of mind Daoism promotes is by not clinging onto things which are illusions. We require the mind of no-mind, the seashore mind, the mind that is wary of attachment to mind. The constant danger, however, is that we will fall prey to partisan illusions and wander from the path, fooled by mind. From Daoist perspective, there is no wisdom in this and trouble can only result. Daoism is not dogmatic about what is and isn’t. It chooses to let things become in a never-ending flow of constant transformation. For that is nature and that is the way. Eat, sleep, go about your business. Do not dwell in mind. Let things transform themselves.

My final excerpt above was from “One The All: Alchemy as Sacred Ecology” in the book *Green Hermeticism* and discusses the Hermetic worldview which includes, once again, the practice of alchemy. (The Chinese piece I have just discussed above was also about alchemy, i.e. “transformation”, but from a Daoist perspective rather than the Hermetic one I now pursue in this final piece.) This piece is perhaps the hardest to pare down to sensible and compact description but I shall try nevertheless.

It begins with a simple Hermetic notion: the cosmos IS ALIVE. As a unity. As a totality. And life is good. “The cosmos produces life in all things by its movement” tells us that life is a natural product of reality’s normal operation. Reality is a living organism for the creation of more life. Everything is connected – “ONE THE ALL” – ouroboros, endless connections, much as I described in much earlier work of mine where I talked about “being-in-the-midst” as an existential explanation of our situation. That situation was described there as

an impossibly large network of interconnected nodes. In essence, that was a basic image of the universe. Here that basic image is taken and imagined as life creating life. A purpose, a consciousness; nature ruling over nature according to nature. What is important here is EXPERIENCE; we imagine “the All” as the experience of a state of consciousness. Here the Hermetic universe and the human subject are the same and we may imagine it as a spiritual rebirth.

Consciousness is here imagined as outside time and space – an ever-present, an imaginary now moment which sustains itself by thought and will. “The things which the eye cannot see are the realities” meaning “our senses lie”, they deceive, they are only capable of misinforming us if we want “true realities”. The idea is that it takes education to see beyond the perception with which our extremely limited senses are equipped. They merely stop us walking into traffic or getting too close to the fire. They are not for perceiving reality at anything but a surface, survival level. Hermeticists such as Paracelsus instead insisted that what we need for deeper perception is “True Imagination”. This is the ability to imagine a continuously unfolding creation. Here “to know” is to be in relationship with, to experience. Our eyes do not see aright. It takes imagination. This path is a way of transformation, an allowing nature to be what it is according to its nature. This is nature’s grace. This is a state of existence where existence and consciousness coalesce. In a way, there is no “outside”. All is one, united. That is why relationship and experience is so important. The writer of this essay, Christopher Bamford, wants this to be a religiously explained phenomenon. I resist that. It is a matter of taking reality seriously, reality that is existence and consciousness combined into one.

We find this immediately with the next proposition: “Everything is a symbol.” In this sense, everything is then the interplay of symbols in a consciousness and in its imagination and

intellect. All meaning and value is here. To know the world is to know yourself and to know yourself is to know the world. "Consciousness is everything." "Every fact is already theory" in the sense that it is embedded in a consciousness, a symbolic network, a logic of connection. To experience is to understand: an imaginative act. Symbols are NOT things that stand in for other things; they are living presences. The imagination, we should never forget, is real and has effects. Consciousness is context. Things transform through imagination and experience. It could be said (and Bamford does say) that there is a task to manifest the unity in/of all things. But there are mysteries: the mystery of being, the mystery of transformation and the mystery of intelligence. Things exist – its a mystery. Things change – its a mystery. Things have an organisation – its a mystery. Reality is substantial, conscious and organised. Here the spiritual goal is "participating in the universal process" and this is seen as consciousness enlivening. It is seen as insight, wisdom, purpose and vision. The task, as this essay describes it, is to take part in that "cycle of everything" which is an ordered spiritual metamorphosis.

D) Epilogue

And so this is what I really must do in my continuing chapters following this one. I aim to set this out not consistently semi-academically (as is my normal medium) but also poetically and creatively. As I write this now, I have no idea what is coming next so we shall have to watch it unfold together. All I know is that we need a vision of something else, something transformative, something that's

GREEN

EROTIC

MAGIC

QUEER

LOVE

THE SUMMONING

You're what I want

You're what I need

Give me your love

Make me a freak

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

Your scent, like storms

Is wild, divine

I want your love

All of the time

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

Connect me

Over to the other side

Connect me

Over to the other side

Your strange music

Like lucid dreams

The power of you

Transforming me

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

I can't wait, I can't wait, I can't wait, I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

I can't wait, I can't wait, I can't wait, I can't wait, I can't wait anymore

Connect me

Over to the other side

Connect me

Over to the other side

Ooh, don't stop now

Ooh, don't stop now

Ooh, don't stop now

Don't stop now, don't stop now

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore (Ooh, don't stop now)

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore (Ooh, don't stop now)

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore (Ooh, don't stop now)

I can't wait, I can't wait anymore (Don't stop now, don't stop now)

("Anymore" by Goldfrapp)

THE INCIPIIT

Escaping the incarcerating city, its polluting, industrial chains slipped,
The feral wildness calls with songs of vital madness and networked green succulence.

Order is transfigured but not abandoned in the verdant grove,
Civilisation is defied and abandoned for queer and ancient reality.

Here is intimacy, viscosity and energy, in the heart of Nysa's son,
Erotic reality changes consciousness and creates naturalistic and fruitful vines.

Coercion has disappeared from this world as love rushes in,
Love that is unfettered, unrestricted, that grows everywhere like ivy.

Let us share this madness together, exploitation a faded memory,
Let us dance and move together in a world made of transforming magic and what can be
imagined...

The Wasteland



a
QUEER
apocalypse
in the
Wasteland

"Vengeance can never balance out or atone for what has been lost. Nor can it bring back the dead to life. There is no peace to be had in vengeance. You will only find pain and madness but never the rest you seek. And so you will become trapped in an unending cycle of loss, revenge and violence, trapped in your own history, become both a fate and a destiny.

But isn't that true for all of us? We follow our paths, repeating the mistakes of the past, fated to be our inescapable destinies, only recreating the problems we wish to avoid, the same on top of the same. We remain ignorant of the fact that nothing can be solved by using the same behaviours we have always used and that caused the problems in the first place. We fail to learn that if A leads to B, and has always led to B, then we should stop doing A and try something else instead."

(The History Woman)

(A). Mad Max

Mad Max was originally a 1979 Australian film about a cop in a failing world who went rogue after a motorcycle gang, who had been terrorising the area largely unopposed, killed his wife and child. It was an extremely low budget film which relied on filming on Australian country roads without permits and using derelict buildings as makeshift sets. It was, however, a surprising hit and so the character Max Rockatansky, the titular Mad Max, has gone on to give his name to a film franchise which now extends to five films with the release of 2024's *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* which is a story set in the same world and about a character who was introduced in the fourth film in the franchise, *Mad Max: Fury Road*. This world, from the second film onwards, is shown to be a wasteland (being referred to as "the Wasteland" by the characters in the films), an empty desert mostly

devoid of urban environments or civilised conurbations that is poisoned, derelict and dangerous. An example of this is the third film, *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*, where we see a destroyed Sydney but outside of the first film actual towns and cities seem all but extinct. *Beyond Thunderdome*, of course, famously also features “Bartertown”, a primitive settlement argued over by Tina Turner’s Aunty Entity and the dual personality MasterBlaster (a mentally deficient adult who has a dwarf sitting on his shoulders) who organises the power plant beneath the city that runs on methane produced from pig shit. But this is not really a city so much as a primitive, if functioning, collectivity.

The *Mad Max* films have been made in two distinct periods. The first trilogy were released between 1979-1985 and starred Mel Gibson as Max. The final two (and any future ones yet to be made) have been released since 2015, feature Tom Hardy as Max and Charlize Theron or Anya Taylor-Joy (or Alyla Browne) as an added character, Furiosa, and tell a story of uncertain relation to the first three. It probably makes sense to talk about the continuity of the films at this point since continuity is, in fact, a moot point. The films, for example, are set in “the Wasteland”, as already stated, but it is not exactly clear how the Wasteland came to be (a question more complicated by the setting being Australia). The second film, titled either *Mad Max 2* (in most of the world) or *The Road Warrior* (in America), begins with a monologue which hints at portentous events that have ruined the world. Subsequent films in the series have similar voiceovers for similar purposes but they don’t all say the same things. The series producer, director and originator, George Miller, is similarly equivocal when asked about this in interviews. The broad picture is that there have been wars for oil, for water, perhaps even involving nuclear weapons (which are held by few countries which narrows down the combatants considerably and makes us question why Sydney would be attacked and by who), which has seemingly led to general economic and political collapse. This must have been quite serious since it has drastically

affected Australia, an island set apart from Europe, America, Asia or the Middle East. Whatever has happened (Miller sometimes also hints at climate breakdown or environmental collapse in interviews as well) has poisoned resources and utterly destroyed supply lines. Capitalism, for whatever reason or reasons, has terminally failed. People are now reduced to scavengers even to survive. The landscape consequently now appears ruled over by various factional warlords (Humungus from *Mad Max 2*, Immortan Joe from *Fury Road* and Dementus from *Furiosa* are all examples) and travel is dangerous (yet necessary to find resources to survive) since you never know who you might run into – or if you will even survive the encounter.

Yet there is more complication than this since the films and their stories don't necessarily all line up. Various chronological timelines of events have been suggested, for example, and continuity is not helped by there being a thirty year gap between the original trilogy and the ongoing films that have been recast. Is Tom Hardy playing the same character, the same Max, that Mel Gibson was? It is at least a question in some people's minds. If he is then where does the *Fury Road* story fit into the timeline? After the events involving Bartertown? Before? Does it matter? And how does *Furiosa*, a major part of the sagas in the fourth and fifth installments with her own history and backstory which fills out details about other places in the Wasteland, fit into this too? This is all amplified by the stories themselves having figures called "history men" or "history women", people of knowledge (not least of the quickly receding and different past now destroyed) who tell tales of how things used to be. These are like chroniclers or people who recite sagas and this seems a clue as to how to actually take the whole *Mad Max* mythos. In my view this is not as some sort of neat, definable timeline of events but exactly as sagas or chronicles – in other words, as fables or stories or myths about the various characters and their deeds or exploits. Did they happen or didn't they? Who cares so long as it's a good story?! Who

cares so long as we learn something from it?! Human beings have a more than adequate history of telling stories one can no longer (or could never) verify but where that does not matter anyway. Stories always have and always will be about more than a retelling of events with a merely documentary purpose.

So my suggestion is that we see Max and Furiosa and Humungus and Aunty Entity and Immortan Joe and Dementus and all the other characters of these sagas as simply mythical figures about whom tales are told. Is it the same Max throughout? What does it matter if these are tales told about a Max character grown beyond sterile fact? We see this attitude used within the films themselves in fact when, in *Furiosa*, various alternate endings are given for the demise of Dementus. We have no idea which is “true” and we only have the film’s History Man as a source for his preferred alternative (which he says Furiosa told him). This is then telling us as much about story and its uses and purposes (and George Miller’s desire to use stories) as it is about the events the stories portray. Stories are always about truth beyond facts (facts being things which need stories to have any meaning or sense anyway) and so we should be wise enough to have an ear for the broader truths of these sagas rather than just for insignificant and, by themselves, meaningless details.

When we do that we can come to the conclusion that the stories themselves – explicitly as stories about characters and events – have something to tell us about more than these simple characters and events. In particular, I think *Mad Max* as a story world has something to tell us about three specific areas of thought, the areas of politics, ethics and gender/sex (a term I carry over from my book *Black Dog* prompted by biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling’s suggestion that gender and sex(uality) are an always entwined, complex phenomenon). Finding out what this is, however, will involve knowledge of both the films

in the series and of pertinent values or questions with which to interact with them. Consequently, I intend to take the 2024 book *Mad Max and Philosophy: Thinking Through the Wasteland* as a guide in this respect. (I find this book shallow in its treatment of the issues in many ways – and, importantly, it does not include any commentary on *Furiosa*, which I can give, as it was not yet released at the time of publishing – but it does stimulate some questions nevertheless.) I do not intend to simply repeat what this book (written by American academics) says though. The book is a jumping off point for entering into the issues of the Wasteland, nothing more. And so with that, let us divest ourselves of civilisation and enter the world of *Mad Max*, the world of the Wasteland.

Mad Max and Politics

The first area I want to discuss here is politics. *Mad Max and Philosophy* has essays on five topics in this respect, anarchism, violence and power, a Hobbesian “state of nature” (Hobbes gets mentioned over and over again throughout this book and, to my absolute annoyance, out of all proportion to his worth), political economy and, in a fifth and final essay, whether *Mad Max* is a political dystopia or not. The last of these essays seems rather pointless and inconsequential to me (there are no stakes to the question) and so I will ignore it in what follows. The other subjects, however, all contain some mileage for our discussion.

We begin here with Aeon Skoble’s essay “Post-apocalyptic Anarchism in *Mad Max*” where a question to answer is if *Mad Max*, the film franchise, showcases “anarchy” in any sense at all. Now in a book like mine here, partly about “nihilism and anarchy” – and as this is the fourth book in a series of books about anarchy generally – this might be a subject I might have claim to know something about. Skoble in their essay wants to discuss “anarchy,

government, society and order” and it will be interesting for my purpose in my text to see how they go about that. We start with anarchy and I would like to orient this discussion for myself from the off by defining two senses of anarchy:

1. A state of affairs with, or of, no order; chaos.
2. A state of affairs, as defined by political anarchists, without leaders; a state of affairs where the only government is self-government.

Definition one here is what noobs or the uninitiated take ALL forms of anarchy to be. The second definition is that one articulated by political anarchists as a preferable state of communal or general existence. Skoble, in their essay, wants to distinguish “no leaders” from “no government” or “no order”, denying the implication that the first must imply the second two as well. Thus, the Wasteland could have no generalised leaders but it might have an order or even a kind of government. Anarchists, I suggest, would tend to question the existence of any of these where they are administered *by others* for the anarchist definition of anarchy is SELF-GOVERNMENT. Skoble, for their part, wants to make the point that “just as the presence of a government is no guarantee of a functional and just social order, the absence of government shouldn’t be taken to imply their lack.” Their point here, something they want to be etymological about, is that anarchy, in the original Greek, technically means no archons, an archon being an authoritative leader figure. It doesn’t then mean people are ungoverned. Rather, it seems to rule out a particular kind of government. (The same point may be applied to “order” as well.)

Now the action of films 2-5 in the *Mad Max* canon takes place in the Wasteland, a place of seemingly no official government. (In the original *Mad Max* everything has not yet fallen and so its not yet “the Wasteland” as it will be after that.) What we get instead is a radical

self-reliance (as a necessity of survival) and/or warlords as the domineering heads of what are in effect self-actualising tribes. Thus there is the biker gang of *Mad Max 2* led by the Humungus. There is Immortan Joe's citadel in *Fury Road* and *Furiosa*. There is the biker horde led by Dementus in *Furiosa*. But there is also the group that have built a little fortress around a refinery in *Mad Max 2*. There is Bartertown in *Beyond Thunderdome*. There are the scavengers who inhabit the hills near Immortan Joe's citadel in *Fury Road* whom *Furiosa* tries to make a deal with for safe passage. That safe passage is in order to get to The Green Place which, as we learn in *Furiosa*, was a place where men and women lived together peacefully surrounded by water and forest. Based on examples like these, we can imagine numerous such places across the Wasteland, here and there and always in unpredictable ways, as people make the best of both their circumstances and their surroundings. The political arrangements of these various groups and places may vary but the franchise tends to favour the warlord leading a band of violent others who take rather than negotiate. Bartertown is seemingly an attempt at something more than this (as is "Planet Erf", the valley retreat of the kids who survived a plane crash in "The Nothing" later on in that story) but we can imagine that warlords are the presumed "natural" default according to the stories told as a whole (only *Beyond Thunderdome* lacks one – assuming you don't think Aunty Entity is an example of one).

But what does this mean? I tend to think it means that, throughout the Wasteland as it has been imagined in the *Mad Max* stories, authority is coming either from those who authorise themselves or from those, like the Humungus, Immortan Joe and Dementus (and possibly Aunty Entity too - though how she came to her power is unknown), who authorise others in their name as ones who have authorised themselves (and presumably fought and defeated challengers to their supremacy as necessary). Either way, there is no "democracy" here but just dominators, the dominated and those who manage to survive

in and between the cracks between these groups. How The Green Place we find in *Furiosa* was run remains a moot point as George Miller has not seen fit to tell us (assuming he has it worked out in his own backstory for the world). Is it meant to be a matriarchy (*Fury Road* and *Furiosa* both mention the “Many Mothers” of this place known as “Vuvalini”) as I discussed in my previous book, *Black Dog*? We don’t know. Much is made in several of the essays I read in *Mad Max and Philosophy* of the fact that the films can all be conceived of as modern “Westerns”, frontier stories about places with, at best, scant regard for the law and a place where opportunists may wield power at their whim. This is then a place of gangs of “outlaws”, vigilantes, loners and a more general population who simply try to stay out of the way of any and all of them whilst trying to survive. In such a world, Max himself appears as a “man with no name” figure, much like Clint Eastwood used to do in multiple Westerns, both Italian and American. Who exactly “the law” is in the Wasteland, however, is a moot point. That’s if there even is any after the demise of MFP in the original *Mad Max* of which Max himself was a member.

What we have here then is anarchy in a vulgar sense of “chaos”. Yet we also have anarchy in the sense of inklings of self-organisation. Assuming you can avoid being enslaved or killed by the retinue of some warlord or other (which is far from certain), you are at your own command and can roam where you may. This is what Max does, adventures here and there aside. The lack of overarching or all powerful government (our current world situation for many of us), gives opportunity for the anarchy those of more anarchist persuasion seek. This kind of anarchy in fact begins at the point at which another’s law and government loses its efficiency and effectiveness. Immortan Joe may rule his Citadel with an iron hand but only a few miles away the scavengers in the hills would certainly question his right to roam through their land and his War Boys could not travel unopposed. (In *Furiosa* Dementus even questions his right to the Citadel he created after

capturing it in a daring raid from the previous occupiers.) The commune at the refinery in *Mad Max 2* are more than willing to defend what they've got but, if they remove the bus that acts as a gate to their compound and enter the Wasteland, then the Humungus will have people ready to give chase and hunt them to their deaths.

This is then anarchy as the anarchist conceives it in the strictest of senses for its self-organising. In all of the cases there are ways to leave (which, granted, might not be without danger) which can put you beyond the strictly local bounds of someone's justice, authority or power. (If Furiosa had got in a car and just driven off herself to The Green Place would Immortan Joe have gone after her alone in *Fury Road*? Quite possibly not. It was that she took the wives with her that was the problem. In *Beyond Thunderdome* one can leave Aunty Entity and her rules behind simply by leaving Bartertown and going out into "The Nothing" – which is what they call the Wasteland.) Anarchy, in the sense I talk about it here, is not then some sentimental benevolent government, a communal "being nice to each other". It is simply the ability and determination to live your own life according to your own choices (perhaps in tandem with others like those in *Mad Max 2* or at The Green Place, but perhaps not, like Max himself). You could choose to belong to a gang of thugs of the Humungus or Dementus variety as much as you could choose to belong to a solarpunk commune of fraternal solidarity. All that would matter is that its you doing the choosing. In this sense, anarchy is acting directly for yourself and at your own determination and is summed up as agency, autonomy and free association.

This might lead someone (someone like me, for example) to muse on whether the seemingly absolute and technologically-enabled power of modern states is a better or worse context to be in than the "anarchy" of the Wasteland with its scattered bands of scavengers and local warlords. Yet, as Alan Moore reminds us, we should also muse if

these situations are, in fact, really that different – for all there actually is in ANY situation is your own agency and the agency of others and all else is a sea of anarchy and opportunity. Michel Foucault talked about something similar by saying that between two people or powers there was always a relation (i.e. a power relation) – and this will seemingly always be so (whichever way that relation goes and whatever consequences it has). There are in fact only many and various self-organising entities (including ones that don't realise it or all but give it up) who act, react, counteract and interact to someone's imagined benefit and/or loss. We may not fear death from Immortan Joe, Dementus or the Humungus in our modern lives but then we might fear being sent to a place where they exist (should we survive) as modern politico-economic orthodoxy dooms us to climate catastrophe and the inevitable wars for resources it will engender whilst bosses, landlords, police and politicians decide what we can and can't do (and we scavenge an existence nevertheless). Acting for ourselves in an anarchist's understanding of anarchy is then not only something actualised in and by "the Wasteland" (where this is perceived as something other to our "normal"). Rather, it is something to be utilised in the present too lest its absence doom you to a future you did not desire. One should always in fact strive for the future one does desire lest one give up one's self-interest and fall prey to the interests of others. When Han Solo said in the first *Star Wars* movie that he took orders from just one person, himself, he was unwittingly uttering a political *bon mot*, one we would do well to pay attention to. Anything can, in fact, be a wasteland like "The Nothing" and the only differences between these various wastelands is in their effects on ourselves and others and how we perceive them and react to them.

In their continuing discussion of anarchy in the context of *Mad Max*, Aeon Skoble links anarchism to voluntarism, the notion that, for something to qualify as "anarchist", then it must be voluntarily done. I, of course, approve of this for one of my "articles of Jolly

Roger's anarchy" (first discussed in *Black Flag*) is that "If something is not voluntary then it should not be done". As we have seen, however, this has no standard of morality attached to it. One can be a voluntary bandit who slaughters passersby for a tank of guzzoline just as easily as they can be a doctor, a shopkeeper or a participant in The Green Place. Voluntarism might then be a political standard of anarchy but it implies no moral component outside of its voluntarism and it doesn't stipulate to what or for what one may volunteer. Skoble emphasises, however, that voluntarism can go hand in hand with cooperation much as we have seen many social anarchists emphasise but which the dratted Thomas Hobbes derided as a workable solution to communal living since he imagined (with no evidence) that, ultimately, unless people are made to do things by a dominating ruler then, sooner or later, they won't do what they are required to do and the whole social edifice will collapse. Hobbes' view was that only force could achieve social cohesion or social benefit and that leaving people to their own voluntary wills was madness. So, as Skoble points out: "For Hobbes, then, anarchism is bad not because we might get rulers like Immortan Joe, but because having no rulers at all is *worse* than having rulers like Immortan Joe." There is not much evidence for this view though and plenty to the effect that a bad leader who wants anything but voluntarism is more than capable of fucking both people and society up (and that this is a regular outcome of having leaders at all). My previous book *Black Flag* is then a 2,000 page case for the voluntarism that is anarchy in contradiction to leaders whilst my other previous book *Black Dog* makes a 1,600 page (queer) case for how to achieve it. (See more on "queer" below.) Both together say that people can, and always have been able to, organise themselves and that, if they know what's good for them, they ALWAYS should. Only in this way can we mitigate the wastelands in which we find ourselves and make any sense in (if not of) "The Nothing".

The Green Place is suggestive in this respect since it seems a place of solidarity and cooperation, one devoid of enmity or strife consequent upon leaders and/or factions – as one would imagine it would need to be as an oasis of “abundance” (as Toejam, one of Dementus’ men, describes it in *Furiosa*) in a desert wasteland. I also note from *Furiosa* that the members of this society seem impressed of the view that no outsiders must come to The Green Place and then leave to go elsewhere to tell the tale to others – for that would signal the end of their collectivity. Each here seems to be generally reliant on the others and impressed of the need to work together and look out for each other. Their resources seem plentiful in comparison to those many others have access to in the Wasteland but they would seemingly all be for nothing if they could not work with each other to their common benefit and in order that this place remain a secret inasmuch as it ever can. The first warlord that finds it will inevitably destroy its polity and then also it materially as well. (In *Fury Road*, of course, we learn it became poisoned and died anyway.) The Green Place, then, is not simply a particular geographical place. It is also the means to maintain and sustain it and make the most of it. Anywhere similar resources appertain (such as Immortan Joe’s Citadel, for example,) can be another Green Place if possessed of the right people with the right attitude to look after it. This in fact happens at the end of *Fury Road* when the surviving Mothers and Furiosa return to the Citadel after Immortan Joe’s death and the destruction of most of his forces. The Citadel then itself becomes a new Green Place in more ways than one. The message here is not “Hoard resources for yourself and use them to coerce people” but “Working together, we can create a place of abundance”. The first strategy here must create enemies struggling against their artificially created lack, the second seeks to make sure there never need to be any enemies because no one lacks for their needs. The first is about there being a leader who decides and the second is about cooperation regardless of leaders. Social order is then not consequent on leaders or force and violence but on the desire and action to create it.

How it is created, and to whose benefit and/or loss, is up to those concerned. As Aeon Skoble puts this:

"People think that the world of Mad Max is one of anarchy because the social order has broken down, but the lack of social order isn't what produces anarchy; it's what produces tyrannical warlords."

What Alan Moore then helps us to see in interaction with this (in works like *V for Vendetta* I will address further on in this chapter) is that there are always bullies and warlords and always others, to the contrary, acting through social cooperation. The Wasteland, The Nothing, is not what might happen to us politically if we are not careful, its where we always are – in Nothing, in a Wasteland; its risks and opportunities are our risks and opportunities. The political choices of self-determination or outside coercion are then always before us and are the contexts in which we must act and interact – hopefully by actualising an appropriate consciousness. If you don't want to live in a world of the Citadel, the Bullet Farm and Gastown then you have to act in such a way as they never need to come to pass – and act against those who would try to create them. Anarchy is then not "a lack of social order" or "chaos": its acting in your own interest (perhaps by yourself or perhaps with others). It is often, in fact, the case that needs overlap and so it makes perfect sense that in *Mad Max* we find Max himself wrapped up in adventures of help to more than himself. We are not islands and cooperation has, and always will be, a staple fact of survival and every day life. The adventure is as much in that cooperation as it is in fights, battles and action scenes or in the oppression, random or systematic, of some by others.

We move now to a discussion of violence and power provided in the essay “Even on the Road, Violence Is Not the Same as Power” by Anthony Petros Spanakos and Ian J. Drake. The essay begins (as so many do in *Mad Max and Philosophy*) with the assumption of a Hobbesian world that is burdensome and violent and inevitably short in terms of our existence in it as someone is bound to come along and kill you. For Hobbes the world was danger at every turn which is why he argued people in general need some kind of boss to protect them. The *Mad Max* franchise obviously offers several examples of such bosses or potential bosses but the authors here want to question their credentials and to distinguish between things like power and authority or power and violence. Often, it seems to me, these arguments and distinctions seem to be about defending some kind of liberal polity and intellectual context which can justify a liberal status quo whilst impugning things that would imperil it. But we will no doubt get to that shortly.

The authors’ description of the setting of the *Mad Max* films plays up the inherent danger of the situation people in the Wasteland find themselves in. There is no civil or political framework to life which means no one is tasked with coming to help if you get into trouble. (This is slightly different in Bartertown, which has the Thunderdome to settle disputes, but that’s a singular place in the Wasteland.) It riffs on the monologue from the beginning of *Mad Max 2* which speaks of the ability and need to scavenge and pillage in order to survive. This requires a certain mobility and it makes me wonder if becoming nomadic would not be the safest strategy in the Wasteland since to be static is to become a sitting duck. A moving target is harder to hit, isn’t it? Certainly, as those in The Green Place knew very well, if you live in one place then you do not want to be found by the wrong people. And the Wasteland is full of the wrong people. Yet, in the Wasteland, everything is also open and movement is sure to attract attention. You only have yourself, or any colleagues you may have been lucky enough to gather, to rely on in either case.

And, as even one of the Vuvalini confirms to one of Immortan Joe's wives in *Fury Road*, you are probably going to need to kill (everyone you meet?) if you want to stay alive with some degree of probability. The Wasteland is explicitly set up by George Miller as a place of kill or be killed, a place of attack first and ask questions later (indicative of his acknowledged love of the Western genre of films). This, in fact, is what raises the question of what the best strategy for survival is in the Wasteland – being alone or with others? Keeping on the move or staying in one place? The Wasteland is, without question, a place of violence (as is our own world, in fact).

We might here think of a “state of nature” (“Hobbesian” or not) as a place of unvarnished violence. With no one tasked to stop, control or legitimate it (as Thomas Hobbes desired), people may, like Toecutter's gang, just be violent as they may. But is that right? There was a police force, for example, in the original *Mad Max* but that didn't seem to deter Toecutter's gang who seemed to do in several random cops and ordinary citizens at their whim. This, I think, is a reminder that people who have unhinged themselves from public morality or legal frameworks of behaviour (basically of any responsibility towards others in a classically lawless Western frontier scenario) suddenly realise that they can do exactly what they like and its really only they themselves that is stopping it. Employed in anarchist ways, this is the notion that one is only a slave because one submits to slavery. “If you cease being slaves there will be no masters” as those from Max Stirner to Saul Newman have said. Here, however, the same thought takes a sinister turn for it comes to mean “If you simply want to kill, rampage and cause mayhem then there is really only you that is stopping it from happening.” Even with efficient courts, prisons and cops such a system can only really catch some of the criminals AFTER the fact and many escape Scott free. Phillip K. Dick stories about “pre-crime” aside, society in general, if it is active at all, is REactive rather than PROactive. Whether society is then violent or not is dependent on

those that make it up and their attitude towards both their natural freedoms and abilities and towards their neighbours.

Institutions which are set up (anarchists would say illegitimately and point out that they are really only other forms of the gang) to control violence, however, must play by some sort of rules. This scenario has played out in thousands of cop dramas as the “why are our hands tied behind our back?” narrative and, inevitably, you get the “rogue cop” (like Dirty Harry) who goes off piste to exact the *real* justice the law won’t allow him to have. (In fact, in the second *Dirty Harry* film, *Magnum Force*, you even have the prospect of the dirty cop, Harry, taking on a gang of other dirty cops [led by David Soul] who have decided to routinely take out “bad guys” the law doesn’t deal with in a case of rogue cop on rogue cops violence!) One then begins to lose track of what the moral line is supposed to be here and to intuit that institutions and rules and algorithms aren’t exactly fitting for real life. Having someone designated to control violence does not result in controlled violence. And so Max Rockatansky himself goes off piste after his wife and child are killed and sets about killing both Toecutter and his gang without mercy. He has entered his own Wasteland prior to the creation of the world as a wasteland based on assumed international levels of violence.

This makes me think about our relation to violence and about its relation to power and authority. It is not a one to one relation or a simple equation (for power or authority may be obtained by means other than the threat of physically inflicted pain as Immortan Joe’s over the War Boys shows through the creation of the pseudo-religion which involves the desire to enter Valhalla “historic” as something which is “witnessed”. The power and authority here is both intellectual and social and not simply a result of Immortan Joe’s threat to kill you if you don’t join in. The creation of the religion, its fiction inhabiting the

War Boys, Immortan Joe being seen as “divine” and someone to impress, means that he doesn’t need to waste his entire energy being violent to everyone. It manifests the power and creates the authority in a non-violent way. Thus its interesting in *Furiosa* when Dementus first shows up at the Citadel and appeals not to Immortan Joe to surrender but to everyone else to recognise their power in their obedience to him and so to give it, and him, up). People might do what the Humungus or Aunty Entity or Joe or Dementus say because they could threaten violence (as any regular cop in many modern countries can also do), but they have also become invested with an authority (which is at least partly intellectual and not automatic) which demands the respect of compliance (at least whilst within their immediate environs or sphere of influence). Authority and the threat of violence (a realisation of power) align here but they may not. If one of the Wasteland’s thugs were to ambush you, you might recognise their violent threat or potential power, but you wouldn’t necessarily at all imagine they had any authority to compel you. (So the child Furiosa when initially captured by some of Dementus’ gang.) So violence alone can only go so far and isn’t simply authority at all.

The question becomes, however (as the authors of the essay under discussion here recognise by reference to sociologist Max Weber), if we can draw distinctions between power and authority in order to legitimate either or both of them. Is there such a thing as “legitimate” power or authority? (Max Rockatansky, the MFP cop with a “bronze badge” in the original film, obviously thought so at one point, one imagines.) A card-carrying member of liberal society would have to imagine so – for that is what legitimates their desire for cops, courts, prisons, etc. Such a system is violent and proceeds by doing imagined legitimate violence to those it singles out as worthy of it (either to counter their activity or to punish it). Our authors here point out that Max Weber thought of having “authority” as something that was justly legitimate whereas “power” could be something

anyone had but *was not necessarily* legitimate. Our authors also reference the argument of Hannah Arendt who suggested that “power” could be the legitimate thing (“the result of people acting freely in concert”) whereas “violence” is simply that which can compel action but without having the ethical sheen that she concedes to “power”. In both cases here Weber and Arendt accord to something a righteous or just construction which they contrast with something else that does not have it. This is basically to distinguish types of violence (and their intellectual basis) from each other in order to legitimate some and make illegitimate others. But why do this? Because in a world where any violence or expression of power or operation of authority is simply undifferentiated wrong no society could “justly” defend itself. Thus, with arguments and logic, people attempt rhetorically to say why one person may do something to another person but why another person may not do perhaps exactly the same thing. (Humans, at least liberal, rational ones, seem to need *reasons* for actions rather than just actions which, if nothing else, shows the importance of reason to them and their need to justify themselves to others by means of reasons.)

But would such arguments then make a blind bit of difference to the Humungus or Immortan Joe or Dementus? Unlikely. They might simply point out, as Wasteland pseudo-versions of Judge Dredd, that “they are the law”. (Aunty Entity would say that she is the law too - but direct disputants to the Thunderdome for resolution.) They would likely scoff at such universalistic, idealist and rationalist arguments and point out, not without merit, that morality itself is a matter of power for if you cannot make it so, then what does it matter what you think? Perhaps the argument here, then, is that behind ALL morality, all claim to authority, there is ultimately a threat (of violence) and that if you don’t have the power to make things so then, simply by that fact, you invite dissent from your preferred ways and the exposure of your lack of power. (Thus, Aunty Entity needs to

be able to compel either the Thunderdome or the Wheel and its punishments or Bartertown's rules are just empty threats.) This might, in fact, be the lesson of the original film. The cops couldn't do their jobs, for whatever reasons, and so Toecutter's gang acted at will to violent consequence. The interesting point our authors make here is then that power and authority are most in evidence not when sickening or deadly violence is being meted out but *when it doesn't need to be*. Rather, the power and the authority is most in evidence when it exists, unquestioned, in the hearts and minds of those who acknowledge *without question* – and so think and act without need for force to be used against them. (A good example here is the War Boy who suicides himself amongst Dementus' biker gang at Immortan Joe's command in *Furiosa*.)

So its there when Toadie announces the Humungus as “the Ayatollah of Rock n Rolla” or when the War Boys chant “Immorta!” with their arms raised to make the V symbol over their heads or when the members of Bartertown assemble on the Thunderdome at Aunty Entity's command (“Two men enter, one man leaves!”). On this thinking, if you have to be violent *all* the time its a symbol that your power or authority is shaky or vulnerable. It is only when it is simply acknowledged, a constituent part of others' habitual mentality, that it is more established and absolute. The more power you have, the more unquestioned it should be. Real power is then the power to habituate and not merely the ability to inflict pain or death (which almost anybody has at random, when you think about it, if they have the will for it). It is the power to naturalise the power itself and make it somewhat invisible to those subject to it. This is the power I have spoken about elsewhere as fiction and language, acts and speech acts, the power to create myths which inhabit and control people and which we see powerfully evident in each of the *Mad Max* films around the figures in positions of dominance. It is also the same power we see in our own world and which states and governments have invested themselves with to the goggling, ignorant

acceptance of most of us. Why do these figures or institutions have power? Because they can be violent, yes, but more so because we have accepted their authority as part of our lives and as part of the stories we tell ourselves about what the world is and how we fit within it. ("If there were no slaves there would be no masters.") But change that, tell ourselves new stories, and that power and authority (which anarchists would say was always illegitimate since one can only obligate oneself) begins to crumble and dissolve. So it is really a matter of the myth that orders time and experience in our lives and the relative positions of the elements within it. What's going on in your head, how you see the world and understand its relations, who puts it there and shapes it, is then vitally important.

Given this description, the Wasteland seems a place in which there is clearly some local and contingent power and authority – and a lot more random violence without it. This is not to concede any of it is legitimate (carrying an anarchist hermeneutic in my own head as I do) but to acknowledge its presence in The Nothing. It also seems that all of it, if with some difficulty or consequence, can be escaped (although to what, and that it might be "out of the frying pan and into the fire", is also not doubted). The point is that there is no ABSOLUTE power or authority in The Nothing (although, again, to some, under the influence of a warlord or, in our context, a state, it might seem so). Of course, it is the task of those with authority to make this seem otherwise. It is an obvious need in the rhetoric of the powerful to impress it upon others that their power cannot be avoided. This is as true in the Wasteland as it is in our own world. But, as already intimated in mentioning the invisibility or naturalisation of real power, *if you have to say it then is it really true?* Isn't it rather always the case that there is an outside or a beyond? If you have a faster car that is longer fuelled than any member of Humungus' biker gang, could you not outrun and escape them? (And isn't this why they have nitrous oxide to make sure that doesn't

happen?) Here THE MYTH OF POWER plays its part again and inhabiting minds intellectually is seen as part of the strategy of real power for fear of disobeying an unavoidable power will do a lot of work that would be much more labour-intensive (and “resource-intensive”) were simple violence always required. Internalising power in subjected people is then vitally important to the instantiation and maintenance of power itself in order that people become both their own police and the police of others. If you are in someone’s head you do not need to be in their face nearly as often. The best army is the zombie army. That, in fact, is what is so terrifying about our modern world, that armies of the easily led and totally inhabited will seemingly sacrifice themselves without a second thought for those who have fictionalised their way into the consciousnesses of millions like War Boys spraying their teeth chrome before going kamakrazee. If you want *real* power, simply create an army of willing and unquestioning slaves who hang on your every word (as, in fact, numerous demagogues today do).

Greg Littmann’s essay, which comes next, wants to focus on “Thomas Hobbes and the State of Nature in the Wasteland”. Sigh. If we must. (I have no idea why the Western (English-speaking) philosophical establishment venerates Hobbes so much. He appears to me to be talking fully out of his arse. Ahhh, so that is why....) Littmann opens with the monologue from the opening of *Mad Max 2* when Max now finds himself an inhabitant of the Wasteland that has formed around him:

“Their world crumbled. The cities exploded. A whirlwind of looting. A firestorm of fear. Men began to feed on men. On the roads, it was a white-line nightmare. Only those mobile enough to scavenge, brutal enough to pillage, would survive. The gangs took over the highways ready to wage war for a tank of juice. And in this maelstrom of decay, ordinary men were battered and smashed.”

Contrary to Littmann's claim in this essay, Hobbes did not base his own philosophy of the viciousness and brutality of Man on "extensive studies of history". He based it, as others more correctly maintain, on his fevered imagination. (To clarify: Hobbes knew nothing of egalitarian societies such as matriarchies in these "studies" and would certainly not have believed such communities, which actually existed and still, if rarely, do exist, could exist. He simply looked out of the window and assumed everywhere else was the same. In error.) Imagining that human beings must inevitably fight each other to the death, always and everywhere, without being suitably controlled by a power above them (this sounds startlingly like theology as the wise will have cause to realise), Hobbes then determined that people need a sovereign to contain them if they would not tear themselves apart. (It is not a coincidence that Hobbes' *Leviathan* was published in 1651 and it is certainly not unconnected to the events of the English Civil War that it was written at all or that it says what it says.) Interestingly, in his preamble Littmann *assumes* (like Hobbes) that civilised society is a good thing, a desirable thing. In fact, it seems on first glance that Littmann is simply a Hobbesian who wants to recommend Hobbes' own medicine as the needed medicament for both the Wasteland and for today. So let's face what he has to say head on.

Hobbes famously believed in a "state of nature" which was red in tooth and claw, every man (who was dominant) for himself and every action selfish. The only interest is self-interest. This leads to his conclusion of "the war of all against all" which so many in *Mad Max and Philosophy* seem willing to swallow whole. This, more interestingly in light of more modern work done historically and anthropologically (some of which is reported by me in *Black Dog*) on the egalitarian nature of ancient and/or tribal societies, is also seen by Hobbes as the place uncivilised humanity starts from. Needless to say, there is modern scholarship now extant which completely denies and attempts to refute this fundamental

assertion. People, so this research says, were (are) not inevitably base, warlike and selfish. In fact, Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jetha's book *Sex At Dawn* specifically goes out of its way to refute each of the terms in Hobbes' famous dictum that ancient life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short", concluding, on the basis of evidence, that it was automatically NONE of these things. So Hobbes (and Littmann after him) is selling a story here. And we shouldn't be buying it without some investigation. Let the buyer beware. (Pre-European America, for example, was not exactly the "war of all against all" Europeans like Hobbes and his modern American [academic] descendants would often believe. But that's another story.)

Littmann's solution to the problem Hobbes has backed him into is that Reason demands the self-interested person (or, in this case, persons) "come to some arrangement with others for (their) mutual good". Bartertown is offered as an example with its codified ways to resolve disputes (the Thunderdome itself in "two men enter, one man leaves" and the later "bust a deal, face the wheel" which dishes out undesirable random consequences at the spin of a wheel). Max, in fact, endures both of these rules of Bartertown's civilisation (thanks to the machinations of Aunty Entity) which offers some sort of vision of a SOCIAL CONTRACT which was a common understanding of how people got their rights at a certain point in European history and is one to which Hobbes subscribed. According to Hobbes, as others, people only get rights by making contracts with other humans. On that same basis, of course, they are then underwriting their own possible future punishments for with rights come responsibilities. But these are rights and responsibilities put on you by the contract you (in theory) agreed to. The idea, then, is that one, in some at least semi-permanent sense, binds oneself to others and they to you as a common contracted entity. (Note, however, that this does not explain how someone born into such a situation is made subject to the contract much as, as with those born in

states, no one can quite explain why states are automatically authorities over and above their citizens. If someone *chooses* Aunty Entity as their leader that is quite different from simply having to accept that she is.) Hobbes goes on to say that such contracts essentially require their policeman because the simple agreement of people will never be enough. So he accepts that a possibly violent arbiter will be required and that they must have absolute power. At this point, any anarchist would object, arguing that only they can bind themselves. But that is not what Hobbes thinks and here we see how his Civil War context has driven his thinking. There shouldn't be disputing parties or split power bases. There should just be an absolute ruler who sees the contract through. Any loss of personal freedom (which the anarchist would surely highlight) is a small price to pay for the strong hand of security. (I am sure Immortan Joe would wholeheartedly agree with this.) Littmann sees the likes of the Humungus, Toecutter and Immortan Joe as suitably Hobbesian figures in this respect and no doubt would see Dementus, who shoots his ally The Octoboss's men in order to capture Gastown, in the same way too.

Other arrangements would probably disturb Hobbes, however. The refinery compound in *Mad Max 2* smacks of a little too much democratic egalitarianism, even if there is a nominal leader (Pappagallo), whilst Barbertown actually is embroiled in a power struggle when Max wanders into it. The Green Place would disturb Hobbes even more since it seems an egalitarian place of harmony and consensual agreement (although, not knowing the details, we can only guess so far). All such places, lacking the strong and singular guiding hand of one sovereign, would be doomed to failure in Hobbes' mind. But it is then strange (or, perhaps, just a story!) that the most Hobbesian figures in the Wasteland are the ones who are brought down. Toecutter, the Humungus, Immortan Joe and Dementus all end up dead (as do lots of their people as a result of their leadership). Aunty Entity, Master (but not Blaster), most of the tribe at the refinery compound and some of the

Vuvalini survive. So it would seem that George Miller himself is not telling such Hobbesian stories after all. The refinery people in *Mad Max 2* escape in their bus and create a new home in the far north, Barbertown presumably carries on when Aunty Entity rebuilds it and a new Green Place, on what was Immortan Joe's Citadel, is created. George Miller seems to want to argue that, whatever Hobbes thinks, this is not a desirable way of life in the Wasteland. Something can come to pass in The Nothing.

Perhaps George Miller simply agrees with me, however, that Thomas Hobbes was talking bollocks (and so are any who parrot his views). Strong leaders don't guarantee peace and plenty and never did. More often than not such figures are corrupted by their position and lead people into wars (being especially sensitive to challengers) or, at the very least, leave a string of casualties behind them. (Putin? Netanyahu?) To the contrary, we can detail societies that have lived in peace over centuries or longer without any noticeable singular, authoritative leader at all. But Littmann, however, says:

"I think Hobbes is right that without rules, backed up by an authority with the power of force, human community life would be impossible. Hobbes is also right to recognize how bad war is and that we must weigh our principles of freedom against the human cost. But Hobbes is wrong that humans only ever act out of selfishness. Stories like the Mad Max saga, in which people do selfless or heroic things, only make sense because we understand how someone could be motivated to act that way."

Littmann then goes on to criticise Hobbes for making "some overly authoritarian political recommendations" but his own agreement with Hobbes that "without rules, backed up by an authority with the power of force, human community life would be impossible" is already itself authoritarian enough to fulfill that criterion for Littmann is saying here that,

unless people are forced, society cannot work. But, from my perspective, that is exactly the question at issue, the question modern anthropological research itself questions and so forces us to ask. Littmann does question Hobbes' assertion, devoid of knowledge of real, on the ground, lived, alternatives, that life without a singular, all-powerful authority is impossible, however, and argues that "democracy" is a better keeper of the peace than tyranny. Hobbes comes out of this looking like the serial misunderstander of human motivations he probably was but Littmann, in my eyes, is not doing much better for the "tyranny of the majority" or "democratic imposition" is scarcely an improvement. He seems to think that, if you pull back from the brink, you can head off the worst of the brutalising vision Hobbes would impose on all of us. But what might it matter to us if Bartertown is the imposition of Aunty Entity or the expressed will of a majority of its inhabitants? If I don't agree with it, then I don't agree! The issue is then the anarchist one I articulated before: who obligates me, myself or others? Do I have autonomy and agency and free association or do I not in this polity? It is to be noted that Max himself always prefers to go his own way (which is not always the selfish way) whether for good or for ill. In probably our last chronological sight of him on film to date, for example, in *Fury Road* we see him disappearing into the crowd after Furiosa's return to the Citadel with the wives and some surviving Vuvalini. Max doesn't even want to stay in a place as abundant as this when who knows where else he could go. We must then imagine there is probably some wisdom to be learned in that and that one might need to be "abundant" in more than just food and water to live a peaceful life. One also needs the freedom of one's autonomy as one understands that.

This leads us to questions of political economy in Paul Thomas' essay "The Political Economy of Bartertown: Embeddedness of Markets, Peak Oil, the Tragedy of the Commons, and Lifeboat Ethics" which wants to question both the economics of

Bartertown and the economics of capitalism. This begins with the assertion, which Thomas says runs counter to prevailing economic thinking (I should point out here that I have gained from David Graeber a profound distrust of economic orthodoxy), that “the economy and markets are *embedded* in society” rather than existing in a separate sphere. This seems manifestly obvious to one as economically uninitiated as myself and so I agree when Thomas says that, as such, the economy “can never exist independently without the society (it is in) as a whole”. What this means in terms of Bartertown is that you can’t just look at the economic aspects in isolation. You have to look at the political and social relations as well and understand each as intersecting with the other. A good point here is that it’s a barter town. Money is not changing hands here. You make advantageous swaps and if you have nothing to swap then you have nothing. We see this when Max goes inside and waits in line only to be asked what he has to trade when he gets to the front of the line. He says he has nothing but, after a scuffle in which his fighting skills impress, he offers to trade that (which eventually leads to him fighting Blaster in the Thunderdome). Thomas tells us that Bartertown is thus an “authoritarian capitalist” system (“a capitalist market economy” + “an authoritarian government”) and this makes me chuckle because isn’t that the only kind of capitalist situation there is? Tell me a capitalist situation where the governing, or the ownership of property, was voluntary and non-coercive. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s arguments here about Property, Capital and State as coercive entities which operate by evacuating liberty then make their point in this respect and justify my own contemporary use of exactly the phrase “authoritarian capitalism” to describe our current political-economic situation.

Thomas thinks we can view the situation at the start of *Beyond Thunderdome* when Max originally comes to town in a Marxist sense, its above ground and below ground nature (underground is where MasterBlaster has been put to run the production of the methane

which powers the settlement) mapping to bourgeoisie and proletariat respectively. Aunty Entity and MasterBlaster represent capital and labour in this imperfect comparison. This is doomed to be destroyed, of course, as the events of the film play out. Blaster is killed in the Thunderdome, part of Aunty Entity's plot to have more control over Master, whilst Master himself will escape with the children who end up helping to destroy Bartertown as it was.

The issue here, and for any town or city, is resources – which such places consume in vast quantities. This has been noted for millennia such as when one discusses the COSTS of civilisation (which we may understand here as that socio-cultural movement which results in people living in conurbations, a relatively recent phenomenon in human existence as detailed, for example, in Graeber and Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything*). One person or one family or even one clan may live relatively self-sufficiently and without making much of a mark. The local ecosystems support them without interruption or consequence. But put thousands of people in the same static place (let alone millions) and suddenly that activity is going to leave a mark. (The ultimate "mark", of course, is threatening the existence of sustainable life itself in a given habitat and this is what we seem to have got to in the real world and have gone beyond in the Wasteland of *Mad Max*.) When you are bursting at the seams of sustainability and needing to cast your net ever wider to accumulate what you need to survive it is a warning to change your ways but not necessarily a warning you might hear. Modern humanity, for example, has been addicted to burning carbon (in the form of oil, coal and gas) for several centuries and, as you use the easiest to find up, what is left gets harder and harder to extract (and consequently more valuable to those who want to make use of it). That would be bad enough. But if that same fuel is what is killing and polluting you, its doubly bad. Bartertown tried to solve the problem of fuel in the post-apocalypse by extracting methane (which is a very

bad greenhouse gas) from pig shit. And they seem to have needed a lot of it. Thus, control of it became an issue as it always will where a lot of power is at stake. With great population can come great desire for power over them (and great desire to make wealth out of them). With Bartertown being “authoritarian-capitalist”, this should not surprise us.

Paul Thomas here wants to discuss “the tragedy of the commons” in this context which I also recall discussing in *Black Dog* in regard to Ryan and Jetha’s discussion of it in their excellent book, *Sex At Dawn*. In their case this was in relation to Garret Hardin’s short but noteworthy essay in an edition of *Science* magazine where he attempted to criticise the idea of “commons” (literally things which belong to no one and can be used by anyone – as in common land, for example) and rubbish them as unworkable. Thomas describes commons here as “individuals hav(ing) free and unlimited access to natural resources unrestricted by any formal or informal rule.” The imagined “tragedy” of the commons here (which, actually, in a major plot twist, is the tragedy of CAPITALISM) is that, in such a situation, people in their unfettered and uncontrolled state will simply use everything up until its gone and then they are all done for (which is what capitalism does for private profit). What Ryan and Jetha said to that, in the case of Hardin’s argument for it, was that Hardin had not looked at any actual commons or taken account of how people, all by themselves, who actually operate commons regulate the use of the commons to common benefit. In other words, they said that, if you actually look at real commons, people DON’T just use them all up without any foresight whatsoever. Rather, they stop people who act recklessly or who are profligate and a kind of communal discipline sets in all by itself. (This makes sense too for wouldn’t you want to protect a resource you were also using? Note how Hardin’s argument here is like that of Hobbes.)

The argument for the tragedy of the commons is really one related to a Hobbesian view of the human being as selfish and self-interested. Figuring that a common resource belongs to no one, why shouldn't an assumedly selfish person simply bleed it dry to their own benefit? The answer, as Ryan and Jetha had it in *Sex At Dawn*, is because other people also exist who want access to the same resource and, unless you are going to either live miles from anyone and keep a resource secretively to yourself or engage in resource-heavy violence to capture and contain it, then you will have to come to a political and economic solution with them about common access for a common resource. This, indeed, is where "economics" becomes necessary at all and it can extend from completely non-financial and cooperative sharing to extremely capitalist and exploitative seizing of resources, creating their artificial scarcity and then selling them to others at an arbitrary profit.

A commons itself would seem to fundamentally rely on cooperation and so the economics and the politics of the matter are seen to be intimately embedded within each other as Thomas has already earlier suggested. One might also here raise the question of scale. In a relatively compact group of people (less than 200) it is relatively easy to monitor a commons and ensure everyone is "playing the game", as it were. But become thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions, and that becomes practically impossible (which is almost certainly one reason why there are less and less commons of all sorts today. The simple scale of modern society allows people to accumulate, hoard, restrict, steal and control beyond anyone's ability to monitor it. What you end up with is capitalist corporations who claim "ownership" of resources and the right to exploit you if you want any share of them, a far larger scale version of MasterBlaster turning off the methane tap unless Aunty Entity says he's boss). The basic point here, then, is that people, especially in large groups, have need of resources and

how those resources are to be shared out is a choice, a matter of alternatives, rather than something fixed. It can be cooperative or it can be business. It can be on the basis of common use or private ownership. Each has its consequences for both the polity in general and for private wealth and power.

One thing I noticed in reading the collection of essays I read in *Mad Max and Philosophy* is that pretty much all of the writers (who are all American academics) seemed at least to some degree amenable to a Hobbesian view of the person and a capitalist view of economics. We should probably imagine that they should be for, as members of the American middle classes wedded to liberal politics and capitalist economics, these things are to a large degree naturalised in their minds. Thus, we get this from Paul Thomas as part of his discussion:

"natural resources may become depleted if they are used without improvement. This raises a question about the potential for order emerging without authorities. Open-source projects seem to succeed without a single authority taking control. Can this work in society generally? People behave most prudently when they make present decisions that have a future effect on themselves. Prudence is a selfish virtue. If the future consequences are to fall on others more than themselves, then people will make decisions just based on the present. The present system provides individuals with opportunities to pursue actions that benefit them while spreading the ill effects (negative externalities) across the larger population. Optimizing or utility maximization for the self in the short run is not optimal for the population in the long run. What is good for each of us is not good for all of us, but what is good for all of us is good for each of us."

This speaks to me of exactly the naturalised acceptances I just mentioned in its “prudence is selfish” and its view that “the present system” optimises private benefits at the expense of public costs (a neat description of capitalism, in fact). But think about this for a minute. Toecutter set up his gang presumably by himself by collecting willing others to ride with him. Humungus and the people from the refinery compound set up their communities similarly. Bartertown surely wasn’t the work of Aunty Entity (or MasterBlaster) alone. The children of “Planet Erf” are the remnants of a plane crash that organised their own society. There is a whole comic book story about how Immortan Joe (formerly Colonel Joe Moore) came to the Citadel. The biker gang of Dementus and The Green Place inhabited by the Vuvalini were to some degree self-organising as well.

However any of these various social contexts came to be, it was not strictly through capitalism or authoritarianism nor at the behest of states or economic systems. It was, at least partly, and varying from case to case, by agreement (no doubt in some cases coerced and in all by triangulating to one’s personal sense of “prudence”) to live and work together, by cooperation. It was people looking after themselves by means of clubbing together. None of those contexts would, in fact, work by the intellectual or physical action of a single person alone. None of the people in these situations can be totally selfish for that would alienate everybody else and create enemies on every side, neutralising the benefits of any cooperation. Even Max, who regularly chooses the highway instead of someone else’s way, goes out of his way to help others to his own cost. (Certainly in the first three films we can argue Max is worse off at the end than the beginning. In *Fury Road* he is left in the same situation he started in, a wanderer in the Wasteland, but without his car.)

In this context, the whole section about “the tragedy of the commons” in Thomas’ essay reads as superficial and as something which unjustifiably blends capitalism (the exploitation of common resources then claimed as private possessions and sold for private profit) with having a commons at all. This is like saying The Green Place is the same as the Citadel – which is clearly not true whilst Immortan Joe runs the latter. One exploits resources under the control of a top down political system and the other, it is to be assumed, does not. The only “tragedy of the commons” to find here is the belief that what is common can ever be privately owned in any legitimate way other than that perpetrated at the end of a gun or that an imposed requirement for a “freedom of society” can legitimately be pursued by forcing people into fixed economic and political relations. (Hardin’s “tragedy of the commons” rhetoric suggested society, assumed to be a meta-entity controlling everything, must act to stop people doing things in order to save itself, a clear case of trying to justify a version of authoritarianism. The problem here, of course, comes when those giving the orders confuse their interest with society’s interest and the best, indeed the only, solution to this is to give people their autonomy and allow them to form associations as they will. In other words, read yourself some Proudhon and realise that authoritarianism and capitalist economics never turn out well for anyone but an elite few at the expense of an exploited mass. What begins in authoritarianism can only end up in coercion and exploitation of some by others.)

This “forcing” continues into another Hardin idea Paul Thomas discusses to round out his essay, “lifeboat economics”. This imagines the economy (if not life itself) as a lifeboat of necessarily limited capacity but, of course, the question then naturally arises who should be allowed into the lifeboat and who should be left to sink or swim (or perhaps be beaten with sticks should they try to get into the lifeboat). This is a bit like asking who should be allowed to inhabit Immortan Joe’s Citadel and who should be beaten off the platform

every time it is let down to facilitate the acquisition or dispersal of resources between the Citadel and Gastown or the Bullet Farm. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people seem to live in holes in the ground in and around the Citadel (one of whom used to be the War Boy Nux according to the 2015 *Mad Max* comic book) and are presumably dependent on Immortan Joe's largesse or their scavenging skills for survival. But they are expressly NOT being let into "the lifeboat".

The interesting thing about "the lifeboat" in this case, however, is that even this lifeboat itself needs to be a regenerating thing otherwise it too will simply run out of what is needed. The Citadel, then, is only really a microcosm of the Wasteland it is in (which is just a larger lifeboat). It is simply the case that ecosystems must be regenerating – in order to support the living population and its needs – or their resources will be exhausted by that same population. Immortan Joe, then, or, latterly, Furiosa and the surviving Vuvalini, need to moderate who has access to the Citadel's resources for, like any resources (such as we find tragically with those of The Green Place), they are not infinite. Interestingly, the appropriately Hobbesian Hardin criticises this lifeboat thinking where there is not a singular Hobbesian leader in charge to dictate who gets what. He imagines that, left to ourselves, the lifeboat's resources will just get used up at the whim of random appetites all selfishly serving themselves. But, as several communities in *Mad Max* show (and not all ones made up of designated "good guys"), any community must moderate its usage of resources, and share, to survive. Immortan Joe is as subject to this in the Citadel as anyone else for, if he starves his army or his allies in Gastown and at the Bullet Farm, then he has no army (and so no power). Cooperation and sharing are thus, once again, mandated and the authoritarian way a Hardin or Hobbes recommends is far from the only, or best, solution.

But then consider what Paul Thomas says near the conclusion of his essay:

"Every person who is on the lifeboat is selfish. Otherwise they would jump off the lifeboat and make room for another person. But there is no guarantee that the person who replaces the selfless person who jumped out of the boat will also do the same. There is no guilt in the lifeboat. Everyone in that boat is a lucky selfish person. According to the cliché, 'Nice guys finish last.' Max in the movie (Beyond Thunderdome) is a good guy. But what is his situation in the end? He could not find a place in the plane and is left behind in the Wasteland. Of course, this is 'reel' life, and he can afford to be left behind for the continuation of the story. But in real life nobody wants to finish last or be left behind. The future of humankind depends upon the ethics of a lifeboat, and the ethics of a lifeboat is that of a selfish person."

"Nobody" does? Paul Thomas' position is that in "real" life (as opposed to "reel" life) no one has ever sacrificed things for someone else – a loved one, a family member, a friend, even a stranger, that no one has been willingly "left behind" so another could advance? This account of events doesn't seem realistic and, I think, we know its not actually true at all for, in reality, people are doing this all the time. Max helping people throughout the films when he always seems to want to stay by himself rings so true as a narrative device because we *know* that people go out of their way to help others, "against their better judgment" as is often said, all the time. Does this always pay off? Of course not. But it "paying off" is also not regarded as the only important thing. Max at the end of *Fury Road* finds himself a wanderer again by his own choice, for example, but he isn't the same person for he has helped Furiosa, the Vuvalini and the now ex-wives get back to the Citadel and he can reap the internal, mental comfort that brings as a consequence. (This is not unimportant given he is shown as suffering mentally from other past decisions he

took and the lives that were consequent upon them.) In *Furiosa* the title character goes back for Praetorian Jack when they are ambushed by Dementus at the Bullet Farm when she could have simply left for The Green Place (as Jack even signalled her to do by firing a green flare). This action saved Jack's life in the short term and could have resulted in her own death in the saving of him – but she did it anyway.

The point here, contrary to Hobbes, Hardin and Thomas, is that people are NOT simply selfishness machines and their actions, if always tied to their needs (which is what Thomas calls "prudence"), are not merely about the fortunes of their singular selves. People have and desire attachments and these will seemingly always play a role in human affairs which, as Peter Kropotkin then suggested, are always best served by cooperation and cooperative efforts ("mutual aid") and having an implicit concern for more than oneself. We think of studiously and deliberately selfish people (such as British politician Nigel Farage who would let refugees drown in the English Channel) as "dehumanised" for a reason.

Mad Max and Ethics

Perhaps from discussing political and, latterly, economic issues, however, we should then turn to talking about ethical ones if we are going down this track? This is interesting and important because it will pose questions not merely of organisation and order, of social interactions and their fallout, but of how we should act, what leads to a good life, what a good life is and to what standards we (and people in the Wasteland) hold ourselves. It will, in other words, raise questions of values. There are five further essays on this subject in *Mad Max and Philosophy* and, again, they are of uneven worth. The first of these, Leigh Kellmann Kolb's "What Saves the World? Care and Ecofeminism" wants to (in my view

extremely superficially) look at the story of *Mad Max* through an ecofeminist lens and argue that Max himself keeps coming back to an ethics of “care” in line with this hermeneutic. This may be true but it will take a lot more than this essay has space to give to make that a substantial argument. This essay takes patriarchy and capitalism as its masculine bad guys and there is nothing wrong with that but it really only sets out obvious points which are where you should start from. It does not progress to answers or ask insightful questions which put the reader on the spot and with a need to answer for themselves. (I shall attempt to do this myself in an “ecoanarchafeminist” section below.)

So I skip to the second of the five essays on ethics: “Seeking the Good Life in the Wasteland” by Andrew Kuzma. Kuzma begins his essay like this:

“Is it possible to be a good person in the Wasteland? At the beginning of Mad Max: Fury Road, Max’s answer is an emphatic ‘No.’ ‘I exist in this Wasteland,’ he says, ‘a man reduced to a single instinct: survive.’ With the road wars and the fallout, it’s hard to argue with Max. Doing what it takes to survive isn’t always pretty. Morality is a luxury of the world before. Again and again throughout the Mad Max film series, however, Max denies this instinct. He chooses to help others, even when it puts his own survival in jeopardy. What does Max find out there in the Wasteland that convinces him that he can do more than just survive—that he can also be good?”

Here we have questions to answer. What is “a good person”? (Besides being a question as old as thought.) What is *the relevance* of being “a good person”? Kuzma says that Max thinks its not possible to be “a good person” because one is reduced to a mere survival instinct. But isn’t survival “good”? Kuzma goes on to call survival a “luxury” but, that being the case, isn’t it always one in a world where everyone must survive? But Kuzma also says

he thinks Max is performatively denying his own assertions when he goes out of his way to help people. Is he? Is he even where he puts himself in danger (as Kuzma would think, “for others”)? I am absolutely not at all convinced that’s true. And I am opposed to Kuzma’s assertion in his opening paragraph that Max “denies this (survival) instinct”. In fact, I find it dubious that Max is trying to be “good” at all or that he has the mentality of a middle class American academic to matters of life and death and survival. So we need to investigate this particular essay a little further. Kuzma has the ability to make what, to me, seem like crassly ridiculous statements. One of these opens his second paragraph: “The idea that you need civilized society to be a ‘good’ person seems like common sense.” Does it? To who? Whose “common sense” is this? Presumably not anyone uncivilised or living detached – who is now reduced to being “bad”. Presumably not anyone from the aeons long human existence before that species began to huddle together in larger settled groups and to “cityfy” themselves. “Imagine a world without governments or laws”, says Kuzma. Well, I do, quite often as it happens, and its beautiful and remarkably free of coercion by governments and corporations. Being “good” doesn’t seem to matter there. But Kuzma disturbs me from my daydream:

“There would be no industry or economy, no building or infrastructure, no art or culture. There would be nothing to do except survive and nothing to keep you safe. Once society collapses, morality goes out the window. You join the roving biker gang or you die. Everyone would live in perpetual fear of violence and death. Life would be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

Oh fucking hell. Another Hobbes obsessive who has never read any anthropology. But Kuzma has put a cherry on top of his Hobbesisms. He thinks it impossible to be moral without “society”. This is a bit of a slippery argument. “Society” and “civilisation” aren’t

simply the same thing. There can be societies that aren't civilisations. And civilisations might involve numerous societies. Can people even live communally, which they did before "civilisation", without society? And wasn't there in fact lots and lots of time before "law and government" (and even times and places after it) where human beings did not simply go around slaughtering each other or reduced to an instinct for survival? Do not cultures worldwide, of many kinds, have art, and music, and creative endeavours? Isn't the Hobbesian "state of nature" as either "primitive starting point" or as "the way people would be if stripped of civilisation and left to themselves" utter nonsense? The ethical application here is that "survival instinct" seems to mandate "Everyone has the natural right to do whatever they need to do to protect themselves", as Kuzma puts this, and this leads to "the war of all against all". So it seems its back to giving up or freedom, engaging in social contract theory and agreeing to having a boss with absolute power. This argument, I'm certain, is as bad ethically considered as it was politically considered.

But Kuzma continues:

"Life in the Wasteland is a war of all against all. If we look at it this way, seeking the good life is impossible. There is no good; there can't be when your choice is to kill for Aqua Cola or die of thirst."

Ah, so this "good" (and "good life") is an idealist thing then. Its not to be found embedded in any or all life, a possibility of life itself, but is a specific kind of life. This makes it something that one either has or doesn't have. But don't imagine I have simply accepted Kuzma's premise. The Wasteland certainly contains plenty of violently acquisitive people who make war on anyone they come across who are not of their group. But that's not everyone. And its not to say people are not capable of "good". Indeed, on Kuzma's own

argument Max himself can't stop himself from doing it. The kids from Planet Erf in *Beyond Thunderdome* take Max in (thinking he's Mr Walker) and that's good isn't it? The pilot uses his plane to help them escape Aunty Entity and that's good isn't it? The people of The Green Place work together and that's good isn't it? Furiosa helps the wives escape and then comes back with some Vuvalini who, together with Max and Nux, kill Immortan Joe and take over the Citadel and that's good isn't it? Here "good" and "good life" are, again, not the same thing. One describes a settled state of affairs (intrinsically hard in a wasteland) whereas the other describes character, disposition and behaviour, things always amenable to being witnessed and shown. If Kuzma thinks "the good life" impossible in the Wasteland then I wonder if he thinks it possible where we live now? After all, a time something like ours (if degrading rapidly) is the initial premise of the original *Mad Max* before the Wasteland. (This was actually meant to be set in contemporary Melbourne in 1979 but budgetary constraints necessitated the "a few years from now" dystopian twist.) Was that a place where you could trust everyone, culture thrived and you didn't have to suspect every passerby was out to do you down? Turn on the news Dr Kuzma. The Wasteland and "civilisation" aren't so different after all. What chance of "the good life" now unless you are Immortan Musk or Jeff Dementus or Mark Humungus?

Kuzma latterly concedes that not all views in the Wasteland are the same (Bartertown is not the Citadel is not The Green Place ethically) so I do not want to be too hard on him about that. But he then makes his discussion about ethics and morality specifically (through the moral philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre) by exemplifying utilitarianism (the belief that "the right action is the one that leads to the best result") and deontology (the belief that "we have a duty to perform certain actions regardless of the results"). Here the first privileges outcomes as the second privileges imagined duties. They both talk about

right and wrong but they don't mean the same things when they do. Kuzma, describing MacIntyre's thesis, thus argues that we now live in something akin to a moral "wasteland" because we no longer have a common morality anymore. Instead, moralities, which are incommensurable, are created and operated in spite of one another. This is analogous to the ethics of the various communalities exhibited in *Mad Max*. People there aren't speaking the same ethical language. The Humungus and his bikers seem to have a fairly basic gang mentality whereas Immortan Joe heads a religion. Bartertown has general rules and a Thunderdome. The Green Place seemingly acts in harmony without coercion. "Good" and "bad" are not the same in these varying environments.

MacIntyre's argument, which Kuzma makes use of here, is that what's missing is a common ethical goal, a common vision of a "good life" it is desirable to have and for which specific ethics fit you. The "virtue ethics" this is based on is about developing character and so kinds of characters. It is a "way of being" and someone living "the good life" can be imagined to have, does have, certain characteristics as a result. Holding this view, there are things people *should* be for such an ethical view is expressly teleological ("telos" is in fact the Greek for "goal" in this sense). MacIntyre, for reasons of his own you can find in his book *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, thinks this view was an "original morality" that human beings lost and the catastrophe in losing it is that what was once shared is now not. So, "without a shared goal, morality boils down to individual preference" and down that road you easily end up trapped with Hobbes again. The point here is then that a communal life of everyone that has a single goal is preferable, on this view, to lots of individual lives that have no communal goal – but only as many goals as individuals. There is then no "good life" in this sense to strive towards and only arbitrary individual choice instead – possibly good lives none of which are the same.

But you might say to this: "Isn't just any morality 'arbitrary'?" - and I don't think you would be wrong to ask that question. For isn't it? One could be Nietzschean about this (as Kuzma recognises) and insist that all ethics are ultimately an expression of someone's will. Allied to an existentialist reading of this, one could then make everyone's life that which they are both responsible for and striving for autonomy in regard to. But would this make us "good"? MacIntyre reserves this for those "in community" following Aristotle's version of virtue ethics which assumes that human beings are fundamentally social. We can then only have a "good life" in community with a common goal. Kuzma argues here that Max the loner is the one who is "mad" whilst Max the one helping others is the Max who has made "good" possible. There is some contrasting of the original Max with a wife, family and legal/moral purpose as a member of MFP with the individualised and survivalist Max of the Wasteland here. The former has a purpose and function whilst the latter is denuded of such things and stripped back to merely existing.

What is emphasised here is how virtue ethics is *a way of life* and not simply an ethical idea. In the Wasteland, then, Max as someone simply surviving is in a situation in which "the good life" (on this understanding) becomes impossible. The "redemption" he then speaks of to Furiosa when suggesting they turn around and head for the Citadel in *Fury Road* is his own and not just everyone else's. It is in their togetherness that ethicality becomes possible on this view, a view which makes "survival" and "ethics" opposing ideas where the first is individual and the second communal. The communal aspect MacIntyre relates to story and narrative, necessarily communal things which mean more because they are shared and point up the importance of belonging to more than ourselves. When Max turns around in *Fury Road* and goes to the Citadel with the others he makes himself a part of a bigger story. His actions are about more than himself. Knowing something about mental health and isolation, I can witness that doing things beyond yourself is absolutely

essential to mental health and so the isolationist Max is accurately understood as prone to being “mad”. On this view, the madness is countered by becoming part of ethical stories bigger than yourself that are made ethical because *they are* bigger than yourself.

The Green Place is interesting here for it can be seen as an example of the “goal” that virtue ethics requires. We see in *Fury Road* that it can be imagined as a mobile ethic as well since, at the end of the film, it seemingly transfers from the now dead geographical location of the original Green Place to the Citadel. But Max apparently does not choose it and is seen once more disappearing into the crowd. Kuzma tries some smooth words here in an attempt to argue that Max is affirming their goal by leaving the Citadel, arguing that staying there could just seem like yet more survival instinct and this argument is not at first convincing, at least to me. But, thinking about it, Kuzma has something of a point for the point at the end of *Fury Road* cannot be “and they all lived happily ever after” for the Wasteland is simply not like that. No one is ultimately going to live happily ever after in *The Nothing*. The point is rather that the goal of Furiosa and the Vuvalini was still on track, the goal embodied in the idea of “The Green Place” at all. (This goal is given more depth by bringing the fifth film *Furiosa* into the mix as well.) Max took his chance and helped Furiosa, the Vuvalini and the wives return. They found their “redemption” and so Max can now go having that also on his conscience as he seeks his own continuance of living well in the Wasteland. His actions, in other words, were honest and authentic and this acted as therapy for what is clearly a troubled soul – as *Fury Road* details throughout. But this does not mean he is then arbitrarily bound to these people forever. It means his story is always about more than himself, as even his own fears betrayed.

This, I think, authenticates my own intuitions about Max from earlier on when I doubted that everything he does is not always about his survival. I think it is always about his

survival but I think that survival is, and must always be, about more than selfish actions that merely benefit him materially. As *Fury Road* argues, and as was seen in both *Mad Max 2* and *Beyond Thunderdome*, Max has needs beyond mere physical survival. He has narratives meaningful to himself just like anyone (compare Furiosa) and these narratives carry values and meanings that need nourishment if they are to survive. It is not just Max's body which needs water; these values and meanings do too. Several authors in the book I am following emphasise Max is always stopping off along the way to help others. The comic book produced prior to the release of *Fury Road*, based on a story provided by George Miller himself that he showed to the actors as preparation for their roles, is yet another story of Max, immediately before we see him in *Fury Road*, helping someone else he meets in the Wasteland (ultimately to tragic consequence and this is reflected in the images Max sees in *Fury Road*, not least of the girl Glory he could not save). It seems that Max truly can't stop helping others despite his singular instinct: survive.

Yet what I would point out here is that what "survival" means for Max in this respect is not simply a physical thing – and that it is not merely a physical thing for any of us either. Rather, we have to survive as who we are *or risk losing ourselves* – which seems exactly the mental torment Max is enduring at the beginning of *Fury Road* and is a character he is becoming already in *Mad Max 2* (one who is just after guzzoline). Max's version of living "the good life", inasmuch as you can in the Wasteland, is not then (by the time of *Fury Road*) something at odds with his singular instinct to survive but is allied with it. One can in fact regularly make the case that, in helping someone, he is also ultimately helping himself (and so, to contradict an earlier essay I analysed, is also part of his "prudence", something that is more than just "selfish"). That this regularly comes with risk is not then a surprise for these people are in THE WASTELAND: it is a risky place, a place where extreme actions keep you breathing! But we may see this as analogous to the Vuvalini

who often have to kill people. They don't want to but their survival as Vuvalini expressly depends on it. It is why Mary Jabassa is reminded, before she goes off alone across the desert to rescue her daughter, that no one who took Furiosa from The Green Place must survive to tell of its location. Their "good life" and their "survival" are intertwined. Aren't they always? So, coming back to Max, it is not a case of "survive or be ethical" for me so much as "*survive which involves being ethical*". Max helps others because he needs to in order to stay sane and help himself. I do not think this is a particularly uncommon phenomenon either. I think there will be people out there who know exactly what I mean and all about the very real need to be able to "live with yourself". Whether that makes us "good" or not is not then really important to me. Survival, after all, is the base concept here and I am happy to affirm that this involves communal activity and involvement (helping others) as much as "selfishness". And survival is a good in its own right. *No people living "a good life" are dead.*

This assertion made, we can move to consider Justin Kitchen's essay "'We're Not to Blame!' Responsibility in the Wasteland". An immediate issue here raised in his opening preamble is that we can easily confuse (or entangle) ethics with law. Or make law the important category and then ask what happens if there is no law (in our modern national and international sense) or if that law is "the law of the jungle", so to speak. There can be "law" only where there is an apparatus and mechanism for its institution, maintenance and fulfillment. This requires at least a community willing to live by a law (or code) and who are collaborators in seeing it policed. This is not to be assumed in the Wasteland even if it might be assumed of some communities or situations within the Wasteland. But that, of course, is only to speak of responsibility to the law in a situation in which you think law is something to be responsible to. (Some may not agree with that responsibility at all and so rebel against the very idea of it. Responsibility before a law requires that

someone acknowledge its jurisdiction over them if they are going to attempt to obey it. Pirates in the Golden Age of Piracy, for example, did not recognise the laws of nation states but they recognised their responsibility to their own articles of association. Thus, they bound themselves to the latter and consistently flouted the former.) Is there anything else we might consider ourselves responsible to, or for, in the Wasteland, however, a place where survival is not certain and days are spent possibly killing and stealing? We see in the Max of *Fury Road*, for example, someone who clearly feels guilty for things he has done, or not done, in the past. He feels responsible whether he is or not. How might we decide if we should be or not?

Since we are discussing ethics in this section of the chapter it is inevitable this will involve discussing moral responsibility. The very idea that there even is such a thing as “moral responsibility” is a disputed one. As a general rule, and guided by those pirates I just mentioned, I have tended to take the view throughout my anarchist writing that “people can only obligate themselves” – as I often put it. Ethically, this has the consequence that our ethics (and our responsibility) are our own Nietzschean or Zarathustrian creations. “We make our own law tables” as Zarathustra might have said himself. Here “morality” is not something I am roped into by dint of the accident of birth and being thrown into a culture where I am expected to obey what my grandparents thought (Nietzsche’s description of morality in *Daybreak*). It is something I actualise for myself as I grow to maturity. Indeed, it is indicative of that maturity (in the responsibility I choose to take for myself to which only I can obligate myself). So this is a different narrative from that one Kitchen wants to give here in his essay which immediately goes off in the direction of discussing how other people may legitimately (which, literally, means “according to the law”) obligate us or how we may be obligated from outside of ourselves. Before getting into that, therefore, I would like it put on record that the very idea of this is a disputed

one, not least in the anarchism I have discussed in previous books in regard to an ethics of self-obligation which opposes it.

Kitchen dives into his discussion by talking about “causal responsibility”, something which follows the “cause and effect” line of reasoning. Put at its simplest here the thought is that if you caused something then you are the one responsible for it (it is something for which you are responsible or, in certain circumstances, can be blamed). This, however, is shown by Kitchen to be not so simple in a social world of multiple interacting and overlapping actions and relationships. That one person alone is “responsible” for something is actually a very rare occurrence because either multiple people were involved in what happened to various unquantifiable degrees or its simply not possible to apportion any individual blame. Kitchen gives the example of the killing of Blaster in the Thunderdome. Blaster was killed by Aunty Entity’s henchman, Ironbar (played by Angry Anderson), but it is not as simple as saying that all the moral weight of killing Blaster falls on him. Blaster’s death was all part of a plot to kill him that was hatched by others and also involved Max. In such a situation, no one person is or was responsible. Ironbar himself could point out that it was Aunty Entity who wanted Blaster dead; he was only doing her will. He could also say that if he hadn’t done it then she would just have got someone else to do it instead. Analogously, members of the various gangs in the Wasteland might say that any death they cause would just be caused by someone else if not them. A decision not to kill someone on their behalf only results in another gang member being sent to do it. By such reasoning we end up in a perverse situation where lots of people get hurt or killed but no one is responsible. War Boys, for example, don’t think they are to blame for anything if Nux is to be believed – yet they all shout “Witness!” before some deliberate act of violence that is aimed to mortally wound someone else and so simultaneously claim responsibility for violent and deadly acts. War Boys can then both simultaneously claim

(moral) responsibility for things *and* claim they are not to blame. (But here it gets even more complicated since they usually will themselves into a state of frenzy before they commit their violent acts and is someone who has passed a tipping point of rational sanity *morally* responsible anymore?)

In communal or complex social situations, then, locating a precise and definitive, individually isolated, cause is often hard, if not impossible. Few of us act, and few actions are performed, in splendid isolation or perfect abstraction. Real life is more complicated than that. Max, however, is in a different situation (much of the time). Max, as we see even from the first film, has the ability to go it alone, to separate himself from collectivity and take deliberate and purposeful actions for himself. So he goes rogue and kills Toecutter's gang. He wanders the Wasteland scavenging for guzzoline. He sets his own destinations and his own agenda. Sometimes, as in the case of the set up fight with Blaster that leads to the latter's death, he gets himself mixed up with others. Even here, however, he is apparently acting to his own code for he refuses to kill Blaster when he discovers his impairment and consequently pays a price himself. Max can make deals with others (I argue never exactly unselfishly) but he always retains the right to walk away. He does not throw his lot in with others unconditionally and eternally even if he is prepared to risk his life for communal goals not strictly his own. He takes responsibility for himself and his morals (and their costs and benefits) are his own.

Kitchen now wants to muddy things up further by asking about "intention", however. Human beings seem to find moral *intentions* important besides actions simply set in a moral framework. If someone was trying to kill someone else but failed it would not be usual to regard them as morally without fault because they failed to achieve their intention. Rather, their intention alone would count against them. Similarly, if someone

tries to lie it is not then strictly relevant if the lie succeeds or not. That lying was the intention is regarded as moral fault enough. Here Kitchen broadens his discussion beyond a simplistic causal responsibility for philosophers have recognised that not all situations are the same. There is, specifically, a certain “moral luck” to our various conditions and circumstances, things beyond our control to which we will be required to react which (so it is argued) affect our choices. If you kill someone, for example, it can be cold-blooded and deliberate, an act of saving yourself in a “me or them” type situation or an act of coercion by someone else. The circumstances in which actions are carried out, or even in which our intentions can be sited, are then not simply either the same or things which happen in the abstract. If there is moral calculus to be done of this sort (and not everyone thinks there is as I have already said) then all this needs to be taken into account. It is not just a matter of causality. Bad things can happen from the best of intentions (Furiosa hides the wives in the War Rig aiming to take them to The Green Place but this directly leads to Angharad’s death) and there are always things beyond our control. (“I got unlucky,” Furiosa whispers to herself as she is trying to bargain her way past the scavengers when the War Rig gets to the pass through the rocky hills.)

The argument is then that people should not be judged with moral severity because of their bad luck. This would seemingly have to work in all circumstances if we want to apply it fairly though. Rabid killers, rapists and thieving scavengers must also deal with luck. We can’t just change the rules because we don’t like such people. Any given War Boy was raised to think a certain way and have a certain mentality. Those in the Wasteland generally, even the Vuvalini, have learned a certain harshness (which involves killing) may be necessary for survival (survival not being a bad thing). It is not as simple as “good guys” and “bad guys” and, even where these things are designated, it is always from a point of

view. (The Octoboss in *Furiosa* goes from ally to foe of Dementus, for example, when the latter sacrifices his men to capture Gastown.)

Take Max himself as another example. In *Mad Max* Max starts off as a cop and becomes a vigilante. In the world of that first film, failing as it is, cops going rogue and killing gang members is still “wrong” – yet we understand Max’s justification for doing it. In *Mad Max 2* Max is both a scavenger who trusts no one else and one willing to help others. In *Beyond Thunderdome* he partners with Aunty Entity for selfish gain, reneges on the deal due to his own ethics, refuses to help the kids but then does and finally sacrifices himself so they can escape with Master in the pilot’s plane. In *Fury Road* he is at first a prisoner of Immortan Joe and being used as a Bloodbag but then (as one with the singular instinct to survive, as his voiceover makes plain) threatens Furiosa and Joe’s wives to achieve his escape before forming an uneasy but necessary alliance with them (and eventually the War Boy Nux who had originally chained him to his car so he could fight) to aid his escape. He ends up going back after Furiosa, the remaining wives and the surviving Vuvalini, when he could have permanently parted from them, before risking his life together with them in order to secure control of the Citadel. He then promptly goes his own way again. Max, I suggest, is neither “good guy” nor “bad guy”. He can kill and leave others for dead and find it necessary even if it still leaves scars. He rides his moral luck and takes responsibility for his own actions and their consequences even at personal cost to himself. It could all have been different and maybe a Max who had not killed Toecutter’s gang before the world fell would have become another person. But he became this one. Can we blame him for what he became? Can we blame him for who he is now? But, equally, does he need our justification, or the recommendation of morality or moral responsibility, for his actions and choices?

This leads Kitchen to discuss the moral circumstances or conditions philosophers find important in determining responsibility and blame. This is necessary because if circumstances (or even just luck) dictate someone could not have been responsible then we treat such people differently to those whom we imagine were more responsible for the things that they did. But we need ways (to make this distinction work) of distinguishing between one and the other. Kitchen, here following the ideas of philosopher Harry Frankfurt in his *Journal of Philosophy* article "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person", argues for two necessary freedoms which, in his view, then make someone morally responsible (or worthy of blame) "regardless of luck". The first of these is a *freedom of action* which means the person concerned was free to act according to what they thought was best at the time. If one is not free in this way, so it is then thought, then they cannot be blamed if they didn't do so. The second freedom is then a *freedom of will* described here by Kitchen as "freedom to desire in whatever way they think is best", a kind of freedom of intention which "align(s) with some deeper sense of identity" which the philosopher Susan Wolf has called a "Deep Self View" or "Real Self View". This all imagines to seem perfectly reasonable in abstract theory. The only problem is that I, after others to be sure, find it to be total nonsense. And in that we impugn the entire Western philosophical construction of the human being itself.

Consider. Does ANYBODY really have "freedom of action"? Can anybody "act in whatever way they think best"? This, it seems to me, is to ask if our actions are ever really just up to us (again, in splendid isolation). I don't see how they can be (not least when thinking in the shadow of Foucault's assertion that we all exist in the context of a social web of power relations). It should be noted here that I am not equating a simple freedom to act with "freedom of action" as it is philosophically being presented here. This distinguishes "the thing I would do in ideal (or even just different) circumstances" from "the thing I feel

myself able to do in the circumstances I find myself in now". I may, for example, be in a so-called Mexican stand off. I have a gun at someone's head but someone else has their gun at my head. If I pull the trigger, which I want to do because I have reason to kill this person on the end of my gun, they will die. But then the other person with their gun at my head will no doubt also pull their trigger and then I'm dead too. Do I have "freedom to act" here or is it more the case that my actions (any actions, in fact) are always CONSTRAINED BY CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH ALWAYS FRAME, SHAPE AND CONSTRICT MY FREEDOM TO ACT? It seems to me that, even in speaking about "freedom to act", we are only ever really talking about the shape and nature of the constraints upon us that constitute the conditions of *any* of our acting. So you can talk about "freedom to act" if you like but you are only ever also talking about "the shape of our constraint" at the same time when you do. Talk of any "freedom" here is also talk about constraint. (This point is central to the anti-foundationalism of Stanley Fish in books like his *Doing What Comes Naturally* or *There's No Such Thing As Free Speech: And Its A Good Thing, Too.*)

When it comes to the matter of freedom of the will, what Kitchen calls "freedom to desire in whatever way (you) think is best upon evaluation" towards the end of his essay, I think things become even more questionable (and that is before we ever get into analysing Wolf's imaginative construction "Real Self View" as if there even was such a thing as a "real self" - or even a self at all). Let us consider, for example, that Kitchen states openly that "Freedom of the will requires that a person reflect". But how does Max reflect when chained to the front of a car in pursuit of the War Rig? When does he get time to consider his "Deep Self View" to see if his "intentions" (whatever they are) align with this dubious entity? Doesn't he simply want to get free, get away and get somewhere safe, in other words, to survive? Isn't that more about "instinct" than rational

thought? Isn't instinct itself just as important as rational thought (without itself being rational thought)?

More than this, however, we might ask what even shapes the human will and note that it is never, and can never, simply be the kind of rational thought process Kitchen, after lots of other Western, analytical philosophers, brings up here. What made you what you are? The *Mad Max* sagas provide two characters that give a good window on that question in the characters of Max Rockatansky and Furiosa Jabassa. Their wills, it would seem to me, were shaped as much by what happened to them as they were by "rational thought" or "reflection". Their values, what things mean to them, their beliefs, their desires, were all fundamentally and permanently shaped by their lives and the events they contained, the things they both went through and that were done to them. Furiosa's will was moulded by the Vuvalini she was born and brought up amongst. Max had an ideal of a kind of life he wanted to live even before personal tragedy struck him and the wider world went away. None of this describes a "freedom of the will" as Kitchen and his referenced philosophers have described it. It describes a much more intimate, personal, inter-relational, circumstantial, contingent and conditional thing that can never be nailed down to isolated and abstracted rational thinking processes. Such are actually abstracted thought processes alien to real life. And they are that for a reason (for Kitchen has always had a reasoning behind his arguments). That reason is to site human life within a deliberative and consistent moral framework *in order to make people rationally and morally responsible, in order to manufacture a particular type of human being, one who could be held to be rationally and morally responsible at all.*

Consider, then, in this respect, the following from Friedrich Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols* in which he discusses "free will" as one of "the four great errors":

"The error of free will. – We no longer have any sympathy today with the concept of 'free will': we know only too well what it is – the most infamous of all the arts of the theologian for making mankind 'accountable' in his sense of the word, that is to say for making mankind dependent on him.... I give here only the psychology of making men accountable. – Everywhere accountability is sought, it is usually the instinct for punishing and judging which seeks it. One has deprived becoming of its innocence if being in this or that state is traced back to will, to intentions, to accountable acts: the doctrine of will has been invented essentially for the purpose of punishment, that is of finding guilty. The whole of the old-style psychology, the psychology of will, has as its precondition the desire of its authors, the priests at the head of the ancient communities, to create for themselves a right to ordain punishments – or their desire to create for God a right to do so.... Men were thought of as 'free' so that they could become guilty: consequently, every action had to be thought of as willed, the origin of every action as lying in the consciousness (– whereby the most fundamental falsification in psychologicis was made into the very principle of psychology).... Today, when we have started to move in the reverse direction, when we immoralists especially are trying with all our might to remove the concept of guilt and the concept of punishment from the world and to purge psychology, history, nature, the social institutions and sanctions of them, there is in our eyes no more radical opposition than that of the theologians, who continue to infect the innocence of becoming with 'punishment' and 'guilt' by means of the concept of the 'moral world-order'. Christianity is a hangman's metaphysics...

What alone can our teaching be? – That no one gives a human being his qualities: not God, not society, not his parents or ancestors, not he himself (– the nonsensical idea here last rejected was propounded, as 'intelligible freedom', by Kant, and perhaps also by Plato before him). No one is accountable for existing at all, or for being constituted as he is, or for

living in the circumstances and surroundings in which he lives. The fatality of his nature cannot be disentangled from the fatality of all that which has been and will be. He is not the result of a special design, a will, a purpose; he is not the subject of an attempt to attain to an 'ideal of man' or an 'ideal of happiness' or an 'ideal of morality' – it is absurd to want to hand over his nature to some purpose or other. We invented the concept 'purpose': in reality purpose is lacking.... One is necessary, one is a piece of fate, one belongs to the whole, one is in the whole – there exists nothing which could judge, measure, compare, condemn our being, for that would be to judge, measure, compare, condemn the whole.... But nothing exists apart from the whole! – That no one is any longer made accountable, that the kind of being manifested cannot be traced back to a causa prima (first cause) that the world is a unity neither as sensorium nor as 'spirit', this alone is the great liberation – thus alone is the innocence of becoming restored.... The concept 'God' has hitherto been the greatest objection to existence.... We deny God; in denying God, we deny accountability: only by doing that do we redeem the world. –"

These paragraphs come after sections of *Twilight of the Idols* titled things like "Morality as Anti-Nature" and "How the 'Real World' at last Became a Myth". They include a section on "Reason in Philosophy" which calls "being" (after Heraclitus) "an empty fiction". (What chance, then, of "Real Self View"?) But let us get to what Nietzsche seems to be saying here. It is that if there even is a "will" (which he also doubts) then it is anything but "free". He imagines it an invention of those who want, who need, to make guilty and so who need to create rational conditions for guilt that would make those accusing people of it seem rationally justified. What Kitchen has been doing in his essay, then, is making an argument for the rational understanding of human actors as morally blameworthy. He has been trying to logically impose a rationality upon us so that he can impose a morality (here labelled "responsibility") upon us. This is something other than the ethics of self-

obligation I referred to near the beginning of my discussion of Kitchen's essay. It is also entirely different to Nietzsche's own ethics of creating new values (and destroying old ones like those Kitchen himself uses).

What Kitchen (and, to be fair, many of the other philosophers on show in *Mad Max and Philosophy*) fears is precisely THE WASTELAND, the Wasteland in all its nihilistic reality and possibility as *Beyond Thunderdome's* "The Nothing". Kitchen is precisely afraid of the lack of accountability Nietzsche actually argues for in my quotation of him and which is all the Wasteland, a land of "nothing" or of endless becoming, itself seems to offer. Nietzsche sees in this a kind of redemption (or innocence?) of becoming, an opportunity of nothing. All Kitchen sees is a distressing lack of rational ability to blame anyone for anything or to impose responsibility for things upon them. But why would we imagine anyone could be blamed (or MADE responsible) in a world of barren harshness where any meaning can be snuffed out in an instant, where one thing just succeeds the next endlessly to no ultimate purpose or meaning? Because we cannot face the Wasteland. Because it is pure nihilism, beyond reason and rationality, not susceptible to moral (because rational) interpretation. In the Wasteland such values crash and burn like many of the Frankenstein vehicles did on the *Fury Road*. Reason, thinks Nietzsche, is our constructed means of dispelling this Wasteland, of trying to fill The Nothing with meaning and of being able to judge at all. Philosophers like Kitchen take Reason and Rationality for true and think it is real. They build intellectual and rational constructs upon it. But it is only a constructed reality, a fable, a myth. Morality, epistemology and metaphysics are all part of this myth. By such myths we lead ourselves astray – and all because we required a rational accountability, a (as Nietzsche says) "moral-optical illusion".

So when Kitchen, at the end of his essay, says “Mad Max is morally responsible most of the time” this is only according to a moral fable he carries with him and shares with some others. “Moral responsibility” is, in fact, a fable itself – as Nietzsche goes into at length in several places elsewhere. Any “calculus of morality” anyone does is a fable, a fable which wants to tell a story of a rational humanity that lives in a rational world because it fears the nihilism of the Wasteland where survival is a value in itself and actions are often hardly amenable to moral calculus. There is no code for right and wrong here but, as Max learns increasingly, only actions and consequences. That won’t stop people looking for codes, of course, in their attempts to externally obligate people to universals. But such is ultimately the search for God and there is no divinity in the Wasteland (a true Nothing) anymore than Immortan Joe was immortal. So, at the end of *Fury Road* when The First History Man is quoted as asking “Where must we go ... We who wander this Wasteland in search of our better selves?”, this strikes me as about right. It’s a personal journey, an existential journey, a journey of actions and consequences. There is no universal standard of judgment to match up to, just our own. We can go anywhere in the Wasteland, make alliances, or not, at a whim.

But it says “we” you might reply to me. “Where must WE go?” Indeed, it does. But what I am saying here should not be taken to imply or require solipsism. I am not imagining isolated journeys in which people shun each other. Such people have chosen the hardest path possible in the Wasteland (albeit one that is still theirs to choose). Ethics, I hope I understand, are always a matter of our relations with and to others and so require interaction with them as both the test and the evidence of them. We become better selves, I would probably argue, in being with others. The isolated quickly become antisocial beings that resent others and refuse their benefits. But we are still on self-directed journeys, as Max shows most obviously, and we are still in a Wasteland. There are

no gods, no universals, no “real selves” to commune with. Our actions are always constrained and our “will” is probably an illusion, not least in it being free. We are encased in an atmosphere of nihilism and must find ways (and not necessarily rational or moral ways) to make it liveable. Which, it seems to me, is exactly the scenario George Miller has set up in inventing the Wasteland at all.

David H. Gordon faces a similar problem to Justin Kitchen in this regard with his essay “Justice, Reason, and the Road Warrior: A Mechanic Reads Plato”. Here the “rational” thing which needs to be invented is “Justice”, something Gordon makes necessarily consequent on “Reason”, this time with the assistance of Plato. He is engaging in exactly the same sort of thing as Kitchen did with “responsibility” and, to my mind, to equally nonsensical effect in what we all know is a Nothing, a vast irrational void devoid of metanarratives of rationality, morality, sense or value. (Here there is not so much Lyotard’s “incredulity towards metanarratives” as their simple disintegration, an impossibility to enforce such a thing.) “Rationality” is then just a fable and there is no reason, external to its own reasoning, for it to exist at all – let alone for it to apply to us. (Nietzsche regards this as an effect of language in *Twilight of the Idols* which I just referred to above.) You might imagine this makes me an irrationalist and, if I have to deny things equally as important to the organic human being as feeling, emotion, appetite, instinct or desire to be a rationalist then I suppose I am an irrationalist too. Gordon, however, is very firmly of the opinion, after an opening very much about cars, that “Reason Belongs in the Driver’s Seat” in what is standard Western philosophical thinking. Descartes, after all, said “I think, therefore I am” not “I feel, therefore I am” or “I desire, therefore I am”. This begins Gordon’s wholly unconvincing argument (to my mind) for why Max is actually really out for justice all along. He is out for justice because “good guys” MUST BE out for justice. “Justice” exists, Gordon implores, and “Good guys”, who are also

potentially real, are those who live up to the standards of this “Justice” – which is both real and definitely exists!

But then Gordon says something I think is really stupid here. He writes:

“The Mad Max films are about who rules, who rules the towns, who rules the streets, who rules Barbertown, who rules the Citadel, and who has access to and control over the scarce resources of water and fuel.”

I have watched all of these films multiple times and I don’t think that’s true. These films are not about “who rules” at all. I would go so far as to say that it is somewhat inconsequential who rules, excepting that the writers clearly imagine someone always will and that there will always be tension, tragedy and struggle around that. Gordon makes this what I consider to be an interpretive error because he wants to frame these “rulers” as the unjust, people unconcerned with justice. He subsequently wants to frame Max (and, one might imagine, Furiosa) as the just: “Max often would prefer just to be left alone, but when forced to choose between serving the just or unjust, Max is willing to risk his own interests in the fight against injustice, which means he has some grasp of what justice is,” he says. But I think that’s (at least partially) nonsense too (and not just because he went along with Aunty Entity just fine and dandy before he knew Blaster was mentally deficient for the prospect of selfish advantage).

I think its nonsense because I think *Mad Max* as a whole is about SURVIVAL and about what it takes to survive and what and how we survive. (Compare the History Man’s “As the world falls around us, how must we brave its cruelties?” from the beginning of *Furiosa*. This posits a world explicitly of “cruelties” and that is “falling” that must be braved in

order to be survived – as the subsequent film and its chronological successor, *Fury Road*, then demonstrates in the lives of multiple characters.) Not all do survive, of course, but that is also a part of the story. SURVIVAL IS NOT, IS NEVER, GUARANTEED – either at all or as a particular kind of person. That is surely something any potential survivor needs to know. And so: “Where must we go ... We who wander this Wasteland in search of our better selves?”, the bookend to the History Man’s now earlier musing about braving cruelties. On the face of it, “Justice” seems as irrelevant and illusory in regard to this as an externally imposed “responsibility” did in the previous essay. We might then ask WHAT rules in the Wasteland. But I don’t think Gordon would like the answer to that either. (NOTHING does.)

That Gordon’s philosophical crutch in this essay is Plato is not to his advantage in regard to how I read him. My own crutch is often Diogenes, an apparent contemporary of Plato’s, and one whom the anecdotes that have preserved him for us tell us enjoyed taking the piss out of him (or sometimes sharing his own!). So when Gordon shares one of Plato’s allegories about a “ship of state” from the *Republic* it doesn’t impress me. Gordon uses the allegory to suggest Plato’s view that reason must be in charge as exemplified in the figure of a ship’s captain. Without an able captain, a ship, and its crew, are done for we are supposed to accept. But I take my ship’s logic from pirates and pirates (so I’m led to understand by my research) often expressly chose their captain rather than having one imposed (that wouldn’t work because pirate crews are voluntary rather than impressed). Furthermore, the captain was there to perform a function (to which he was assumedly expressly fitted) but had no more authority out of battle than did the other crew who all acted as a brotherhood. Captains could be stripped of title and marooned if they led the crew astray or betrayed them. Plato, however, thinks of captains as bosses (who have a sense of “justice”) and of ships as things which need bosses (and their justice) just as

states do. Its a different set of values because for pirates the “justice” comes from self-obligation to agreed articles of association, the captain the same as any other. There are no bosses here and the “justice” is their own. Gordon ploughs on regardless, however, and seems determined to argue that justice for Max (the cop turned vigilante turned scavenger turned survivor) “is akin to the North Star”.

Gordon then tells another tale by Plato, this time “the Myth of the Charioteer” from both the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*. This myth imagines concocted parts of the prospective human being as horses (Spirit and Bodily Appetite) of which Reason is in control as charioteer. “Justice” here plays the role of “the proper balance between the soul’s parts—Reason, Spirit, and Bodily Appetite”. Gordon applies this to both the State and to Max. Reason should rule the State (good luck finding one where it EVER has!) even as, in Gordon’s fevered mind, “Max is attempting to rein in and control the willfulness of those he encounters, who often are resistant to the reins of reason.” Is this the Max who wandered off to kill people in the original film? Is it the Max who ended up by a tanker full of dirt (which he probably didn’t realise was full of dirt) at the end of *Mad Max 2*? Is it the Max at the mercy of Aunty Entity at the end of *Beyond Thunderdome* or on his own in the Wasteland again at the end of *Fury Road*? If this is all the result of “Reason” then it is certainly questionable where this leaves Max even as it is questionable if this is anything to do with a singular “Reason” at all. Don’t ALL the people in the Wasteland have their reason? Don’t all do things for reasons of their own? Must we equate being reasoning beings with some reified version of Reason it is our duty to obey? (No.)

The problem with following people like Plato as opposed to people like Diogenes (the latter of whom certainly had his reasoning processes, yet without making us all subject to one Reason) is that you then construct the human being as a particular thing and must

make all your good examples of that thing reasonable (by whatever arguments, however pathetic, you can muster) and all your bad examples of it unreasonable (or out of touch with the one Reason). Gordon attempts to follow this procedure here arguing, after Plato, that “reason is our essence”. But why is it “our essence” any more than feeling, or instinct or appetite or desire is? How are these things being essentialised and ranked? How isn’t this arbitrary storytelling? Why should we take someone seriously who says, in the course of this argument, that “Max throughout the films is calm, cool-headed, and deliberative”? Cue John McEnroe. (You cannot be serious.) Gordon’s entire essay actually seems very much a polemic set out to argue that calm, rational people are fully human and the emotional, instinctive, impulsive people are animals (and that there is an appropriate, Platonically-inspired difference between humans and animals). But do you know what? I think that Gordon’s “Justice” is just as invented and imaginary as Kitchen’s “responsibility” was. They are two peas from the same pod. *This is the Wasteland* and if Plato turned up spouting his idealisms he wouldn’t be able to get out an allegory before he was left for dead. Even if you can imagine it, there is no Justice. There is survival. For that we need no false gods. We need the actions which lead to the consequences we seek.

The last of the “ethical” essays to consider here from *Mad Max and Philosophy* is Matthew P. Meyer’s “Look, Any Longer out on That Road and I’m One of Them, You Know?: Madness in Mad Max” and this title plays on something Max says to his police boss in the original film. Mad people are usually absolved of moral responsibility (what is often legally termed “diminished responsibility”) by reason of their madness so one or two authors of essays in this book’s collection might do well to consider that when writing an essay about a character explicitly called “Mad Max”! Meyer himself has paid attention to this fact and so his essay is one which considers various understandings of “madness” in

the context of the aforementioned requirement for rationality, a rationality the Wasteland seems entirely to threaten with Nothing.

We start with the original film which is the one which initially labels Max as “mad”. Without having watched the film this title might seem ambiguous because, in English, “mad” can mean “crazy” but it can also mean “angry”. Watching the film, one might still wonder which applies but the overall interpretive context of the story pushes us firmly towards the view that Max risks losing his sanity due to the world he finds himself daily wrapped up in. The quotation which Matthew Meyer takes as his title here is proof enough of that. Max can see, even before tragedy strikes him personally, that even doing what he does and mixing with the people it involves him mixing with risks completely contextualising his entire life, making him like those he is meant to protect people from and is distinguished from only by a badge. The original film begins with Nightrider tearing up the neighbourhood whilst ranting into the radio and as we are introduced to Johnny the Boy, Max’s final victim in the film who actually claims to be mentally unwell as reason not to hurt him, Toecutter and the others, we meet a group of people who seem to have eschewed moral, legal and even political normality for their own “unhinged” way of life. They are, without even knowing it, a foreshadowing of the Wasteland in themselves. That this Wasteland is a place of madness without “sane” external frameworks seems something we are constantly reminded of throughout the *Mad Max* canon and is something Max himself is preoccupied with throughout the original film. In fact, as the actor who played Johnny the Boy said in interview about it, which Meyer reports, Max himself does go mad and he kills more people in the film than anyone else does - and very much on purpose. It would be as well for American academics commenting on this, then, to take “madness” into account when they do so. “Mad” does not necessarily go so well with “responsibility” or “justice” or “morality”.

What is “mad” here though? Is it becoming detached from social morals and culture? Is it eschewing, or paying no attention to, the law? (This might be how we describe Toecutter’s gang in general in the first film.) If it is, then what distinguishes it from the simple counter-cultural who disdains a way of life and prefers another one? (One thinks here, for example, of members of various travelling peoples who live at odds to the ways of the static population, often not without friction.) In some people’s minds, not very much does. We will probably all be used to people who regard people who engage in “alternative lifestyles” as “crazy” or as those who have “a mental illness”. Sadly, this intended insult can be levelled at people from those who campaign for environmental protection and preservation of the earth as a viable living habitat to those who have minority sexualities or gender expressions. That gays or trans people are “mental” is, unfortunately, not an uncommon slur but it does at least inform us that madness is regarded as a negative and to someone’s detriment. Madness is not then a thing someone wants to have or be identified with. This is true in *Mad Max* too according to Max’s own use of it – both before and after his own madness manifests. Madness here seems to be a breakdown of “societal normality and stability”, or at least a personal break with its values, and so, once more, can be equated with the Wasteland to come, a void of rational and moral Nothing. In fact, in mentioning I was going to be writing about this subject, an acquaintance of mine said the following: “In an insane world, sanity is insanity. Therefore (sanity) cannot exist. The movie (*Mad Max*) should just be called ‘Post apocalypse guy who used to be a driving cop ergo now still drives but law is gone so you get the idea’” and you can kind of see that this correspondent has a point.

For Max, especially in *Fury Road*, his flirting with madness is clearly upsetting and is in his consciousness on a continuing basis. The fact the films have an unclear chronology means we cannot be completely developmental in our explanation of this but another aspect of

the madness in general is then that, being involved with it, it is experienced as a burden or something to be battled with. (*Fury Road*, on one level, seems the story of how Max battles with his.) This is not to say it always is. We may see someone like Nightrider, or Wez from *Mad Max 2*, or others like Immortan Joe's War Boys, and imagine that a further alternative is simply to abandon oneself to it. What shame is there in speeding oneself to either the grave or the gates of Valhalla? In *Furiosa* we have a character called Dementus (which is clearly related to "demented", a further term for being mad) and it is clear that in his past he, too, suffered much trauma. We know, for example, that by the teddy bear he wears chained to himself that he lost children to the Wasteland in the past. This reminds us that madness is a sickness and that vocabularies of therapy, health and well being are appropriate to it. People who are mentally ill can be made well again with the right treatment – although we must immediately admit that the Wasteland might not exactly be the ideal place to find it. This simultaneously informs us that trauma affects and changes people psychologically, sometimes in quite profound and long term ways. I can say this because I have personal knowledge of it. The question then becomes, as Matthew Meyer also frames it, one of how this acquaintance with madness affects us in a modern world that views rationality and being rational as the standard of "humanity". All these "crazies" (whether kamakrazee or just regular crazy) would be dismissed as non-human, little more than beasts, and so easy to dismiss (or kill) – as, in fact, they seem to be in the real world. But wouldn't that impugn people like Max (revenge killer of his family's murderers) and Furiosa (revenge killer of her mother's, and partner's, murderer) too? Or should we just rest easy knowing that a diagnosis of madness takes away responsibility?

Meyer wants to point out that in Western culture, as it has developed intellectually, rationality is the gold standard of human being. The real human beings are the most rational people, the ones who use reason (often this is partisan: "our reason") and shun

“emotionalism”. Rationality is meant to put us into direct and intimate contact with assumedly good things like Knowledge and Truth and Morality and, as Plato suggested in the course of the last essay I discussed, set the ship of society on the right course. But in such an intellectual framework madness is seen as that which removes rationality and so threatens the course of the ship to such an extent it may crash into the rocks of immoral irrationality. Madness makes one irrational and irrationality is a rationalist’s worst fear (which is why I imagine so many of the rationalist essayists I am interacting with in *Mad Max and Philosophy* fear the Wasteland so much. This reminds me of an anecdote about Lars von Trier’s film *Melancholia* in which the most depressed character, played by Kirsten Dunst, seems the least worried about the impending destruction of earth. The point made is that those who undergo consistent mental trauma or dis-ease become acclimatised to it and develop coping strategies. They have to otherwise they would simply break).

We saw before how rationality is set up as the grounding of morality so to be irrational risks making one immoral as well. If we imagine madness as a contagion, as Meyer suggests people have done and still do, then “the mad” are a standing threat to the health of society in general (seemingly the attitude in the original *Mad Max*). Which is probably why in the Victorian era vast sanatoriums were built to house swathes of “mad” people. I have personal experience of this because I have lived most of my life near to one of these buildings that was built on what was then the outskirts of my home city. As a child, I even visited a relative there who had been sent to it. It was mostly not full of the stereotypical “raving lunatics” but sad and quiet people shut in with their pain. Its worth reminding ourselves here that most mentally ill people are not a danger to anyone else and that, if they are a danger to anyone, its most likely to themselves.

Opposing madness to rationality, however, has consequences. In moral terms, it bears on the question of knowing right from wrong and if you have any ability to. In courts it bears on the question of if accused people can be held responsible for criminal acts or not. Here “knowing that you were doing something wrong” becomes important to jurisprudence. Do we imagine Max knew he was doing something wrong as he chained Johnny the Boy to the car and set up the bomb? How about as he collected dripping guzzoline from the car Humungus’ men had just attacked, trying to ignore those left for dead after the attack? Did Max think he was doing something wrong in partnering with Aunty Entity in order to lure Blaster into the Thunderdome or in assisting Furiosa and the wives with their escape? The idea behind all of this goes back, once more, to the deliberate intellectual construction of a rational human being, one who knows right from wrong, one in control of (and so responsible for) their actions, one subject to their own, rational and moral self-control. Uncontrolled people have often been compared to animals, in fact, and animals are not accorded the imagined credit of “rationality” at all.

This human/animal distinction bothers me, however. You do not see animals murdering each other, for example. In fact, as the rationality I am talking about has been constructed by our intellectual forebears, animals are incapable of murder for such is a rational act carried out with deliberation and planning. This rationality then seems to make us capable of acts so bad that an animal, which is in this respect innocent, could never accomplish or fathom. Which animals are currently living a lifestyle which is a threat to planetary ecosystems? Which animals throw their poisonous trash behind them as they go? Which animals do their fellow animal down for profit? Animals are imagined as possibly passionate but ignorant things, a “base” state of nature, and we humans are imagined, seemingly by our rationality alone, to have transcended both them and that realm. But can that rational/irrational distinction carry water?

Personally, I find this as unlikely as that notion which has wild sex as beastly, animal sex. As Ryan and Jetha informed us in their book *Sex At Dawn*, however, this ascription is almost entirely false. Most animals are not remotely as interested in sex as the one species of life that is: the human being, that species which engages in all kinds of sexual appetites and “perversions” and often with a near singular focus on sex itself into the bargain. Being wild and sex-crazed does not make one an animal, it makes one a human. This doesn’t sit well, however, with the intellectual fantasy of the “rational” human being and that is how untruths persist in society and culture. No doubt the sex-obsessed and the perverts are also viewed as “irrational” and so almost certainly as immoral and animal too. But this is all based on that fundamental fiction that the human being is distinguished by their rationality and that rationality is the foundation stone of morality. Human beings must thus be distinguished from irrational animals and must never leave the furrow of a rationally configured humanity such as places like the Wasteland threaten to make them do. The Wasteland is a lawless place, a huge red flag for the rationalist, for the law is meant to be our codification of morality in rules of practical action. It is that which keeps our society on the straight and narrow and stops it crashing, headlong, into the rocks. The War Boy Slit remarks to Nux that Max is “a raging feral” when it is suggested he be taken on the road in pursuit of Furiosa and we are meant to understand by this that Max is mad, irrational and immoral as a consequence. A rational person, so it is imagined, would act both with responsibility (for others) and be possessed of self-control, things Max is imagined by the War Boys to lack. So he is feral, wild, an animal. Muzzled.

But this does lead us back to questions I hinted at earlier in which “madness” and simple “alternative lifestyles” (a catch all term but it will do) might seem to be coalescing to the extent that one cannot always be so clearly distinguished from the other (not least in a world where “mentally ill” is a slur you hurl at people you don’t like). Meyer, in his essay,

wants to point out that the War Boys are trapped in a cult of Immortan Joe. In *Mad Max 2* Humungus refers to himself as the “Lord” of those who follow him, another possible cult situation (and, at the very least, a gang - which might not be so different). What’s the difference between a cult and a gang and just being in someone’s army? (Even people in the armies of states will more than likely have to pledge allegiance to a head of state or a country or a flag or something similar, and to obey the orders of their superior officers. I know because I once had to before a photo of the Queen of England.) Max fears in the first film that he is just like those he chases with only gang colours (his “bronze badge”) effectively distinguishing him from those he is tasked with chasing. If Toecutter and his gang are mad then why aren’t Max and Goose and the other cops? We might here go on to muse that legitimate states that are supposedly based on rationality and are imagined to codify this in laws kill far more people in the world of our experience than all those put together who are designated “mad”. So what is sane and what is insane when faced with facts like that (and what real difference is the designation making)? In our world, “sanity” is far more dangerous than “madness”.

Now in writing this book I am tasked with asking what ethics has to do with this. Hopefully, you will have noticed my scepticism towards this narrative of rationality that has been prevalent in the West for about 400 years now, taking Descartes as our starting point (albeit with much earlier antecedents like Plato and Aristotle). My abiding vision, being made to think about it in the light of *Mad Max*, is of Max himself as a man who is “mad” but who is, thereby, not unethical. If we want to judge him by a law table of rationality’s making, the one that wants to write out laws and control everyone’s behaviour under an arbitrary authority, backed up by guns and bombs, then we are going to find him wanting. But then we are also going to find everybody wanting, sooner or later, on that score as well. There will always be other laws and there will always be other

rationalities and they will all assert their claims upon and over us when they need to. Modern states, in some cases, outlaw being certain things (such as gay or trans), outlaw taking actions aimed to stop violence against people (as in trying to put arms factories out of business) and even outlaw warning people in protests about the dangers of changing climate. If you are thirsty but without money you will find it illegal to take a drink from a store or to steal food simply to survive. Do you judge your survival higher than obedience to a law you are told is based on rationality and morality? I hope so. But what does that then mean for that rationality and morality? (Yes, this is an argument that you should fuck both the law and the government, and any cops who show up too, because your survival takes precedence over their authoritarian rationalist fairy stories.)

To be honest, then, I think I have come to see Max as passably an example of the self-organising figures I discussed earlier on. Max is one who comes to act on his own recognisance, to take his future in his own hands, and to take responsibility for the consequences. This doesn't mean he always gets it right. He often gets it wrong, in fact (i.e. in every film), and this leads to constant setbacks (a shot out knee, a wrecked car, being sent off into the desert, being captured and used as a bloodbag). Max Rockatansky is not a superhero, he is very much a fallible human being, but also one who has taken responsibility for himself. *I call this ethical*. Some may call it moral. I, however, prefer to save the morality talk for the kinds of ideas the essayists in *Mad Max and Philosophy* have discussed, the systems of thought which people try to impose upon us. As I have earlier tried to argue, however, I come to reject this approach whole and entire (finding imposition unethical) and offer Max as an example of one who does something else: he obligates himself and doesn't assume to obligate others. Of course, he is not averse to making deals with people but these are always seemingly imagined as temporary and in some way mutually beneficial. (Another Max – Stirner – might call this forming a union of

egoists.) Max will obligate himself to working together with those (“good” or “bad”) he needs to progress his situation but he doesn’t imagine this makes any kinds of general laws or moral imperatives impositions upon him. He also has needs and, as for most of us, some of these needs can only be socially satisfied. He is driven by a survival ethic though, as I have tried to argue, rather than a philosopher’s abstract rational principles of good and evil. Life is a situation, a survival situation, in the Wasteland and, if you want to survive, you need to act accordingly. If you were relying on abstract principles here you would likely find the Wasteland as empty and horrific as many of the essayists seem to do in their justifications of authoritarian rationalities and moralities they imagine we just happen to “need” to maintain what they regard as “civilisation”, an antidote to the Wasteland and to The Nothing. But the Max who has gone mad doesn’t rely on them. He relies on an ethics of survival where one can only obligate oneself and so survive to some meaning in the Wasteland. Anarchy and nihilism.

Mad Max and Gender/Sex

I come now to the essays that deal with gender and sexuality in *Mad Max and Philosophy*. There are four of these but I only judge two as worthy of interaction for my purposes. I am starting with the last of them, Jacob M. Held’s “Gayboy Berserkers at the Gate: Sex and Gender in the Wasteland”. Held here begins by pointing out that “There’s a great deal of homoeroticism in *Mad Max: Road Warrior*, or so I’ve heard.” This plays on his young naivety in regard to what he was watching as he watched *Mad Max 2* as a youth in the 1980s, not realising that the mohawked Wez having the twink “Golden Youth” chained behind him on his motorbike (and his assless chaps) was meant to signify something sexual. (I can claim similar naivety too, if not exactly complete innocence.) Of course, when one gets a little older (and someone more worldly-wise points it out) you suddenly

realise that there does seem something different about all these biker dudes dressed in BDSM gear and then you start to wonder what and, slowly, it acquires meaning. But why should sexuality (in either of its senses) be a concern in the survival context of the Wasteland?

The most obvious of the films in this respect, even including *Furiosa* as the essays I have been commenting on couldn't since the film was not yet released as these essays went to press, is *Fury Road*. It is here we are introduced to Immortan Joe's incarceration of females as "milkers" and "breeders" (the latter originally the reason he acquired Furiosa as a "full life" child from Dementus along with The Organic Mechanic to oversee his harem) but it should not be lost on us even here that this same Furiosa would, a few twists and turns aside, rise to become Joe's trusted (more fool him!) Emperor and the driver of the War Rig. Although pretty much all of Immortan Joe's power structure is based on dominating masculinity and the control of females as a resource, a seemingly capable female (who only has one and a half original arms) is not excluded simply because she is female. In the case of *Furiosa*, it is helpful that we now have a back story that tells us how she got there (regardless of several failed escape attempts). Aunty Entity's rise to become the creator and ruler of Bartertown remains enigmatically, and annoyingly, unexplained. Can we say here then that, in the Wasteland, men are valued for their ability to contribute to a war machine (if often only as battle fodder) whilst women must either fall prey to men as resources or stand out by distinguishing themselves in masculine ways (which makes them useful for masculine purposes)?

A kick in the nuts to this thesis is the Vuvalini, seemingly the name of a people (maybe just politically rather than genetically constructed) led by women. Their society, glimpsed all too briefly at the beginning of *Furiosa*, does contain men (as it must if they are to have

any children) but it seems women take the lead. *Fury Road* refers severally to the “Many Mothers” and its imaginable that these are those pulling the strings in The Green Place. These do not seem, from the enigmatic hints laid by George Miller and his co-writers of *Fury Road* and *Furiosa*, to be a war-like people. They seem concentrated on defence and maintenance of the natural resources they have seemingly lucked into or found. But they do not appear aggressive (as opposed to defensive-minded) or about acquiring more and more. So they do not look for fights or seek to add numbers to their polity by conquest. They are not about dominating more and more territory or more and more people. The men in their society seem free and equal members of it in a place where all are working together willingly for a common goal. One wonders if Miller and his writing companions relied on notions of matriarchy in conceiving of The Green Place. It seems suggestive, not least when Furiosa can list her clan, birth mother and “initiate mother” in *Fury Road*. Why, in a post-apocalypse, would some people organise themselves in this way (assuming it was not an originally pre-apocalypse formation)?

Perhaps so that they didn’t become organised in that other, more masculine, more controlling and controlled, way? Aside from the banal truth that some people can give birth and other people cannot, why do people need to be biologically essentialised into one of two possible categories (which are far from absolute – biologically, socially and functionally – anyway)? Medically, everyone is different. Even twins (which are genetic clones unless they are dizygotic or fraternal twins) have developmental differences which cause their bodies to biologically diverge. In his essay, Held wants to argue that, in the Wasteland, things can become biologically essentialised. Men are stronger and so must fight whilst women, who can give birth, are inevitably going to be exploited for their reproductive benefits and products. But the Vuvalini stand as a contradiction to that. There we see women as fighters (it is women who pursue Furiosa’s abductors) and no

indication that ability to breed is even singled out. The roles and classifications people are then even put into becomes a matter of something more than “nature” naively or simplistically understood.

So when Held wants to quote gender-critical troublemaker and taker of any right wing money that is going, Kathleen Stock, from the 8th edition of *The Philosophy of Sex* to bolster claims to a sex of “natural kinds”, I find myself rolling my eyes. He thinks it is relevant to point out that Aunty Entity and Furiosa are biological women in *Mad Max* but I must state that I am not sure why it would be. *Furiosa* reveals that for several years the titular character, originally acquired by Immortan Joe from Dementus as part of a bargain for her possible future breeding worth as a full life, hung out amongst Immortan Joe’s War Boys (after escaping from a predatory Rictus) by pretending to be another War Boy (in other words, by performing masculinity. At one point, when planning an escape under the War Rig, she even covers for herself by showing a bottle she had supposedly just pissed into). Aunty Entity would seem to be doing something similar in plain sight (her stockings and high cut dress which reveals her legs notwithstanding). In no film that either of these characters appears in do they seem to be leveraging femaleness or femininity to gain anything. It seems, to my eyes, to play little role. All we can say is that, in the Wasteland, some can make biology essential (in both senses of this term) and others might not. We can think like Immortan Joe or we can think like those who don’t. In the Wasteland, you are free to choose. So I refute Held’s notion that “(what) the *Mad Max* franchise seems to indicate about sex and gender is that sex matters.” It matters to warlords exploiting women for milk and children. It is not forced to matter to anyone else. It didn’t seem to matter much to the Humungus and his gang or in Barbertown.

In truth, Jacob Held seems something of a sex and gender conservative from my perspective. Going back to Wez and the Golden Youth in his essay, he wants to bore on now about “sexual orientation”, something he suggests there are “myriad definitions” of. I think Held is right when he says “Defining *orientation* is about classifying the world” but I think that this then becomes a reason *not to do it*. Those who have read the appropriate chapters of my previous book *Black Dog* will know that I was persuaded by American sociologist John H. Gagnon (or, perhaps, was heartened to find I agreed with him) that sexual *orientation* is materialist mythology. Gagnon talks of sociological sexual *preferences* in his writings as opposed to (biological) *orientations* and I think the difference makes a difference. What is that difference? I think its the difference between imagining you have no choice by dint of literal physical constraints and having one because your biosocial reality is not physically stopping sexual engagements or relationships of multiple differing kinds.

I, for example, would not describe myself as “gay” but that did not stop my 12 year old self from rubbing their penis against someone else’s penis and gaining sexual pleasure from the experience (frottage). If I did a similar thing now it would, I’m sure, result in a similar outcome. But I see no reason to label either it or me as “gay” as a result and to imagine that some inherent or necessary description of me has been given. So I don’t understand why people need to be classified by sexual desires turned into stereotypical orientations or predilections (as if that’s what they were). Any of us can engage in multiple kinds of activities to mutually pleasurable outcomes. Forcing us to fit into stereotypical designations, much less classifications, of them would only seem to be an unhelpful and unnecessary barrier to that in my view. (To be clear: I think it something we do that we don’t need to do.) Each of us may prefer this or that (preferences) but this does not preclude something else, much less should we think something about our

materiality makes it impossible. That just seems like ignorant stupidity for all that Jacob Held asserts in his essay that “we have reasons for wanting to do so”. The only remotely benign such reason I can think of is to associate with people you think are like you but even then all you actually need to do is engage with people and see what you each do, or don’t, like. Maybe you will then find new things and expand your sexual experience or sexuality itself. I posit it would be good if you did.

For all that *Mad Max* as a franchise is about survival and the exploitation of people as resources, it is not really about sex or romance. Of course, here the first film stands out as Max has a wife and child he clearly adores. But once they are dead he seems to lose all appetite for such things. In the rest of the *Mad Max* films there are no hook ups or liaisons for Max such as we might expect in other, similar films. Max is seemingly not “looking for love” in the Wasteland (not even when Immortan Joe’s scantily clad supermodel wives showering down in the desert are revealed to him) but then no one else seems to be particularly either. Is this a conscious decision by George Miller to keep away from such subjects? Even the partnership (I put it at no more than that) of Furiosa and Praetorian Jack is not particularly sexualised (about which Tom Burke, who plays Jack, was pleased). The only sex I can remember seeing in any of the films is in *Mad Max 2* when Max retrieves the truck that will haul the tanker full of gas and must storm through the camp of Humungus and his followers to get to the compound. As he does, a tent is ripped away and a male/female couple in semi-naked loving embrace are exposed to everyone. Sex is apparently not playing any large part in George Miller’s telling of the Wasteland and so neither sex nor sexual orientation are apparently that important. (An honorary mention must go to The People Eater here, however. His obsession with his nipples is one of the more obvious sexual references in the series. His wincing when Dementus suffers a severe shock to his own nipples whilst bargaining with Immortan Joe in *Furiosa*, along

with Rictus' sexually predatory nature towards the young Furiosa herself, are rare examples of overt sexual references throughout the franchise.)

Perhaps the more relevant exception to Miller's steering clear of obvious sex in *Mad Max* is Wez and the Golden Youth, the Humungus' prize fighter and his twink boyfriend (who famously gets killed by The Feral Kid and his boomerang, a very Australian way to die). Held describes this as "homoerotic" but says it can only carry this designation "if you begin from heteronormativity". (As I have discussed elsewhere in *Black Dog*, heterosexuality and homosexuality necessitate each other [according to a two-pole understanding of the human being] and are invented in the mid to late 1800s as the scientific, medical and political desire to *classify people as things* comes to the fore in the Western world and the newly invented subject of sexology.) His point is that it can only carry this valuation, and possibly count as "odd" (his term), if you start from a position of heteronormativity. No one calls anything "heteroerotic" because this is not a description of difference. It's a description of a presumed normativity. Held points out here, I think meaningfully, that this is not really dwelt on even in *Mad Max 2*. So Wez has a gay boyfriend. So what? "We've all lost someone we love" says the Humungus to Wez after the death of the Golden Youth without passing any judgment whatsoever. Given how the *Mad Max* franchise treats love of the romantic sort throughout five films, Wez should probably feel lucky that he got love, of any sort, with anyone at all. Virtually no one else seems to. What effect this has on the viewer, however, is hard to describe. Are Miller and his co-writers telling us none of this matters in the Wasteland? Has the Wasteland denuded the importance of even simple companionship or sexual partnership, something seemingly so indelibly coded into us as a species? We can perhaps understand why Max steers away from it. His loss must still burn like a scar that won't heal. Attachments are fine until they are ripped away from you. Then they just hurt. But is everyone else here

like that too? It would seem, as Held also seems to conclude, that in the Wasteland no one cares what your sexual preferences are. They have other things on their minds. (We should be reminded, in addition, that male/female sexual unions in the Wasteland which lead to birth might often result in deformed children due to the pollution of the atmosphere and environment. A strong disincentive to make children.)

Overall, then, *Mad Max* would seem to be ambiguous about gender/sexuality. (This, as I remarked much earlier, is a term I have adopted/adapted from biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling's use of it. It indicates the view that gender and sexuality are always entangled and inter-related.) Roles are not fixed and stereotypical and sexuality or gender (or even biological sex) may not even be particularly relevant. We may then want to think of the Wasteland as a cultural reset and, in the absence of overarching social narratives, lots of micronarratives might break out. If here there is a bio-essentialist farming women for their produce, over there there is an egalitarian community led by women. If here there are gay bikers who have found love, over there there is a wanderer with seemingly no sexual appetite whatsoever. The point in all this might be that with the destruction of gender/sexual culture and the politics that enforces it a new freedom has broken in where things that used to matter don't need to matter anymore. (Any regime of gender or sexuality needs to be policed otherwise all the exceptions to the regime risk destroying it. The Wasteland, we may note, is then explicitly not policed in general.) This seems to be what Aunty Entity is saying to Max about how she was still alive the day after the world fell. It did fall and on the day after the circumstances were different and a black woman like her, a "nobody", could end up running Bartertown. Once again, then, the Wasteland might here be playing the role of nihilism in regard to the former systems of a "civilised" world. Only in this case its a matter of sex and gender nihilism. In the absence of socially enforced sexual structures, one may make one's own – or have none at all. I thus reject

Held's bio-essentialist conclusions, such as they are, preferring those which see the Wasteland as a blank slate or a new start or a simple absence of metaphysical or metasocial control.

The last essay I want to consider from *Mad Max and Philosophy* is Jacob Quick's "Liberating Mother's Milk: Emperor Furiosa's Ecofeminist Revolution" which is the second essay from this collection of essays which addresses "ecofeminism". This time, however, I think it does so with much more substance and relevance to the subject at hand. It does so by highlighting the patriarchal aspects of Immortan Joe's regime with ecofeminism as a liberating and analytical narrative that stands in contradiction to it. This narrative has the further advantage of being relevant to the context of everyone in the Wasteland in that it exactly is a wasteland – which is to say that ecofeminism addresses the patriarchal oppression of both women in particular and nature in general at the same time. This is especially welcome when, as Quick points out, "In addition to imprisoning and subjugating women, Immortan Joe also hordes natural resources like water and uses it to control the people. In a post-apocalyptic nightmare, Immortan Joe has cruelly subjugated an entire society and ecosystem to his will."

This is perhaps best exemplified in Immortan Joe's warning to the people not to get "addicted to water" lest they come to "resent its absence", a most perverse way to put our attachment to that resource which not only human beings but all life needs in order to survive. This is, in fact, the writers' way of showing that Immortan Joe has grasped and enslaved nature to his will in the environs of the Citadel whole and entire. (Notably this has been done, as Jacob Quick also points out, by giving us a literally vertical representation of society with wealth and plenty at the top of the Citadel and abject, desperate poverty at the bottom – and even beneath it where people live in literal holes

in the ground. This invites the humans and animals comparison once again in the political construction and organisation of the Citadel.) In order to better situate the following discussion of this, let us look briefly at ecofeminism as a way of thinking before coming back explicitly to Jacob Quick's analysis of *Fury Road* and Immortan Joe.

Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, in the preface to the second edition of their book *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, describe ecofeminism like this:

"Ecofeminism addresses the various ways that misogyny, heteronormativity, white supremacy, colonialism, and ableism are informed by and support pernicious anthropocentrism, and how analyzing the ways these forces interconnect can produce less violent, more just practices. In the 1990s, ecofeminists worked to remedy a perceived problem in feminist theory, animal advocacy, and environmentalism, namely a lack of attention to the intersecting structures of power that reinforce the 'othering' of those thought of as 'women' and 'animals' and the ways this othering contributes to the destruction of the environment. Though sometimes called 'utopian' or 'concerned with too many issues,' ecofeminist theory exposes and opposes forces of oppression, showing how problematic it is when these issues are considered separate from one another..."

Ecofeminist theory helps us imagine healthier relationships; stresses the need to attend to context over universal, overgeneralized judgments; and argues for the importance of care as well as justice and emotion intertwined with reason, in working to undo the logic of domination and its material and practical implications on all human beings, other animals, and the planet."

They continue in their first chapter by saying:

"Ecofeminism is a robust philosophical practice with engaged, activist roots. Ecofeminists can be found around the world—planting trees in Africa, protecting indigenous crop seeds in India, challenging cattle-raising economies in South America, rescuing animals from catastrophic fires in Australia, working to end environmental racism in the United States, leading lively discussions on college campuses, pushing for climate action in legislative bodies, and fighting the earth destroying forces of patriarchal capitalism in the streets.

Ecofeminism posits that the domination of 'nature' is linked to the domination of 'women' and that both dominations must be eradicated. (Of course there are a number of ways to understand both 'nature' and 'women'.) Analyzing mutually reinforcing logics of domination and drawing connections between practical implications of power relations has been a core project of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism has a rich history in feminist struggles against militarism, capitalism, racism, colonialism, environmental destruction, and patriarchy. Ecofeminists, over decades, have addressed these overlapping, interconnecting issues."

In order to bolster this description of ecofeminism, I shall further quote their "brief overview" of "ecofeminist philosophy" from this same chapter in full:

"Ecofeminist philosophy often starts with a discussion of the value dualisms that have structured Western thought. Karen Warren describes these value dualisms as 'disjunctive pairs in which the disjuncts' are oppositional, exclusive, and organized hierarchically. Val Plumwood elaborates, 'Dualism makes difference the vehicle for hierarchy, it usually does so by distorting difference'. She explains that a dualism 'results from a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other. This relationship of denied dependency

determines a certain kind of logical structure, in which the denial and the relation of domination/subordination shape the identity of both the relata". The dualistic structure of Western thought constructs 'a devalued and sharply demarcated sphere of otherness'.

Among the dualisms Warren, Plumwood, and other ecofeminists identify are culture/nature; male/female; mind/body; master/slave; reason/emotion; and human/nonhuman. The purpose of the dyads is not only to demarcate and perpetuate difference, but to mark those with power and those available to be exploited by those with power. These binaries also constrain our thinking about other ways to understand our relationships with each other, other animals, and the rest of nature. Critical analyses of and resistance to dualistic and hierarchical conceptual frames are central to ecofeminist philosophy. As Ynestra King noted in 1983, the dialectical relationship between the subjugation of women and the subjugation of nature is supported by these hierarchical dualisms and must be resisted at all levels.

Unfortunately, ecofeminist criticisms of these dualisms sometimes have been construed as endorsements. Ecofeminist analysis has often been mistaken for a prescription of favoring the abject sides of the man/woman and culture/nature binaries, in an attempt to reverse the value dualism. That those considered women are thought to be closer to nature is one of the ways that patriarchal power has diminished both. Early on, there were some ecofeminists who sought to revalue women and nature by celebrating the constructed connection, while also critically analyzing the ways that this association justified domination. There isn't anything 'essential' about these connections, and to think that elevating those who are devalued is perpetuating the dualism is one of the ways that dualistic thinking infects our imaginations. Value dualisms that empower one side and dominate the other are necessary for maintaining oppression, both because, as Warren

suggested, they are exclusive and because they maintain fictitious binaries. For instance, the man/woman dualism inscribes a gender binary that precludes the possibility of gender fluidity, reifies a fiction that one must be either/or, and fails to notice the fact that other-than-human beings don't constitute their lives via human binary conceptions of gender. Using common terminology, like man and woman, should not be construed, without further discussion, as accepting a binary construction of gender nor as an endorsement of the patriarchal values associated with the terms.

Of course, ecofeminists recognize that every claim we make is unavoidably influenced by a range of cultural understandings and valuations. Ecofeminists, like everyone else, acquire particular views in particular places at particular moments in time. The culture, history, and society in which we emerge as thinking, feeling, acting embodied subjects shapes our concepts, opinions, hopes, and aspirations. How we categorize and interpret the world around us has much to do with our context which in turn shapes our understanding, explanations, and interpretations of the world. Given that people are situated in various contexts, ecofeminists reject 'essentialist' claims and claims to universal applicability. In addition, ecofeminist theory stresses the importance of concrete and contextual mutual identification and mutual affirmation, of interdependence, and of empathy and compassion. Ecofeminist philosophy is responsive to the existence and desirability of other-regarding interests and is committed to being as inclusive of different lives and experiences as is possible.

One of the important ways that ecofeminists have sought to value different lives and different experiences is by rejecting hierarchical views of value. Recent work exploring parallels between animalization, dehumanization, and racism further illuminates why hierarchical approaches pose particularly troubling problems. Consider the hierarchical

Great Chain of Being. Though this idea has historically been used for a variety of different purposes, basically the Great Chain of Being puts white cis-men right below God at the top of a supposedly 'natural' hierarchy, with other humans below them, animals below the humans, plants below the animals, and inanimate things below plants.

Within the categories that contain humans and animals there are often thought to be 'natural' hierarchical divisions too. Claire Jean Kim discusses the ways that scientific racism operates in these long-standing fictions, where white men are above non-white men and then below those men are African men, more or less equal to chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans. She writes, 'the ape comparison was more than just a forceful metaphor meant to denigrate . . . the Negro.' It was the white man's placement of the African man 'in the human/animal borderlands where he was variously seen as subhuman, not quite human, almost animal, actually animal'.

Value hierarchies rank beings in virtue of the qualities or capacities they might share with those at the top of the hierarchy. This hierarchical way of thinking is central to liberal humanist scholarship as well as mainstream discussions of animal ethics. Hierarchical ideology can appear expansive, the men on top may want to include people of other races in political communities because they share qualities that those on top find important or they want to include animals in moral considerations because like humans they are sentient and experience pains and pleasures. These hierarchical ways of thinking often get taken up by those who mean well, but they nonetheless erase other ways of living, experiencing the world, and valuing ourselves and our relationships. These hierarchies don't simply enable, but also reify ableism, heterosexuality, settler colonialism, and whiteness. And they are fundamentally anthropocentric—as it is human qualities that are those that form the pillar of the hierarchy."

Let me finally end this quote fest with a further quotation from Carol J. Adams in the introduction to the book she edited in the early 1990s (about 30 years before the book I just quoted from), *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*:

"For many years now, women around the world have worked to transform a social order that sanctions human oppression and environmental abuse. We see the interrelationship of social domination and the domination of the rest of nature, such as deforestation that displaces indigenous peoples; hazardous waste sites located near poor and Black neighborhoods; industrialized factory farms that eliminate the small family farmer; and international policies of free trade that hurt poor people and the earth. Women are the major caretakers of victims of pollution, and along with the poor they are the primary victims of industrial pollution. The overwhelming majority of the millions of people denied the basic rights of clean air, water, food, shelter, health, and well-being are women. Aimed at both preventing and solving environmental problems, our responses have included designing solar cookers and greenhouses, transforming farming methods that damaged the environment, challenging loggers, analyzing economic policies that fail to measure environmental protection (or housework) as 'productive,' holding vigils outside of slaughterhouses, investigating chemical dumping, protesting war and the military-industrial complex.

The term ecofeminism defines these global activisms and analyses.

Ecofeminisms might be more accurate in conveying the diversity of these responses to environmental exploitation.

Ecofeminism identifies the twin dominations of women and the rest of nature. To the issues of sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism that concern feminists, ecofeminists add naturism—the oppression of the rest of nature. Ecofeminism argues that the connections between the oppression of women and the rest of nature must be recognized to understand adequately both oppressions."

All this seems like a good basic orientation to what ecofeminism is about and it is of immediate relevance to Jacob Quick's analysis of the world in and around Immortan Joe's Citadel in the human/animal way of valuing that seems to be going on there. In this respect (and after the likes of scholars Cary Wolfe and Carol J. Adams) Quick wants to talk about "humanized humans" and "animalized humans" at the Citadel. The former are the likes of Immortan Joe, his sons (all of whom are disabled due to the effects of the Wasteland, as is Joe himself) and those privileged by Joe since they are of use to him or in positions of power within his organisation (such as Furiosa, his Imperator). There is some question about such a categorisation, however. Are Immortan Joe's "breeders" humanised or animalised, for example? It is true they are given the best of everything (necessary so that they may give birth to healthy "full life" sons – an outcome seemingly not so far achieved – including the still born child cut out of the dying Angharad on the Fury Road) yet they are also kept caged in a locked vault. Their status is, thus, seemingly a matter of dispute along with the "milkers" who are equally privileged relative to those who live in holes below the Citadel but just as imprisoned since they cannot relinquish their function freely. More obvious examples of "animalised humans" are the War Boys, War Pups and Max himself as we find him hunted, captured, marked and designated as property by The Organic Mechanic and assigned a cage as a Bloodbag. Max is reduced to a physical resource much as the breeders and milkers are. As if to emphasise Max's status,

we need only recall the words of Slit to Nux that he is “a raging feral” who must be kept muzzled.

Returning to the milkers and breeders, Quick has an interesting way of categorising them consequent on ecofeminist interpretation by Carol J. Adams in her *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. Here, noting that things like eggs and milk are “feminized protein” in the words of Adams (“protein that was produced by a female body”), Quick can develop a hermeneutic of Immortan Joe as the patriarchal oppressor and, indeed, industrial farmer of women’s bodies. Joe is essentially oppressing “Mother animals” as Adams identifies in her own work more to do with our own, patriarchally industrialised, world. In differentiation to our world, however, in the world of the Wasteland domesticated animals (which we may equally see as enslaved following Adams’ hermeneutic) seem to have often disappeared. (We see some in both Barbertown and The Green Place but these should necessarily be understood as oases in a vast polluted desert and so anomalies that prove the rule.) Joe’s solution to these issues is to use specially selected women as animals. (The role of The Organic Mechanic seems important in this respect. *Furiosa* informs us that he was initially part of Dementus’ retinue [apparently for the benefits of his medical knowledge] but that Immortan Joe bargained for him in the deal which led to Dementus controlling Gastown so that he might better oversee the quality and care of the women he was enslaving.) Quick consequently comes down on that side of the argument which regards both the milkers and the breeders as “animalized women”.

Immortan Joe is, in fact, an almost classic case of that which ecofeminism takes aim at. He industrially farms animalised women (as well as bullets and other weaponry at the perversely named “Bullet Farm”, a name which mixes productivity with death as does the

moniker “antiseed” for bullet also mentioned in *Fury Road*), conquers and consumes natural resources and aims to have a monopoly on the natural environment itself. This is very much based on a philosophy of physical, patriarchal acquisition and possession. He makes bold claims in regard to that which he regards as his “property” (a masculine conception in this frame of reference) and essentially asserts a type of possessive, controlling masculinity. Thus, Jacob Quick is right to assert that “When (Immortan Joe) looks at nature, he doesn’t see an environment to live in and interact with, but an object to be owned.” In this philosophy, ownership of resources brings the power to enslave people who rely on those same resources and this explains the seemingly thousands of people who live in the ground round about the Citadel. Where else can they go with any hope of survival when even our designated “good guys” in *Fury Road* (who are provisioned in ways the others are not) decide that their best bet is to go back to exactly the place they first came from even if it inevitably leads to some of their deaths and without even a guarantee of making it at all? One might imagine that Immortan Joe could organise irrigation and agriculture in the land around the Citadel in order to produce more food for those round about but, instead, he organises the growing of plants inside the Citadel and on top of it where he alone controls their distribution. As any capitalist knows, artificial scarcity is the first rule of economic exploitation. You will get nowhere as a tyrannical patriarch giving subsistence away for free. Perhaps this is why so many in the modern world are opposed to ideas like Universal Basic Income?

All this amounts to alienating people in general from less coerced, more naturally integrated, circumstances. Whilst it might not necessarily be true that Immortan Joe or his War Boys were those who “killed the world”, in the location of the Citadel (and, to a lesser degree, Gastown and the Bullet Farm which rely on the Citadel’s supplies and form part of Joe’s Wasteland empire) the world very much turns according to Joe’s desires.

Water becomes “Aqua Cola” and is seemingly a branded product Joe dispenses at will as its owner. This not only puts him in charge of its supply, however, but alienates people from the notion that water, a naturally occurring resource, belongs to no one and is freely available. In the Wasteland, of course, water is at a premium, not only because of its scarcity but because it can go bad or become polluted at any time (as we see in a particularly spectacular toxic storm which ends the initial chase sequence of *Fury Road*). We see someone trying to sell irradiated water to Max at the beginning of *Beyond Thunderdome* and in *Fury Road* we learn that the water which kept The Green Place green went bad, killing an entire habitat. People and the land and its resources have thus become alienated in the Wasteland and Joe is doing all he can to exacerbate this in and around the Citadel. Instead, the people are trapped within a system of politics and economy ruled over by a patriarchal tyrant, ignorant of more natural, or simply other, ways of living. One would imagine that only the success of Furiosa, the returning wives, and the surviving Vuvalini offers any hope for these people and their way of life as *Fury Road* concludes.

It seems to me, as one barely initiated into ecofeminist interpretation, that if it is anything then ecofeminism is the ability and the desire to give an alternative interpretation of the circumstances and relations of life on earth. And it does not do this with an anthropocentric bias. Ecofeminism seems to say that things can always be different and that they do not need to be the same from place to place either. Even such basic attitudes stand in stark relief to those that are exhibited by Immortan Joe who, as both a typical patriarch and a typical tyrant, would insist on people in general believing that there is his way and there is no other way. In this respect, capitalism is a patriarchal economic creed. It preaches capitalism, more capitalism, and only capitalism, a creed of domination, exploitation and artificially manipulated availability. There is no other way, so capitalism

insists. Furiosa, the rebellious breeders and the Vuvalini don't agree, however. The former two determine to escape the clutches of Immortan Joe at mortal risk to their own lives (one imagines Furiosa's more than the others' in this respect due to their function in Joe's world) and the latter are more than happy to assist the others in taking over the Citadel, ending its alienating influence and control of life in the area. It is not insignificant to me here that they achieve this by reclaiming their agency and autonomy. "We Are Not Things" is one of the things the "wives" write on the walls of their former prison cell before their escape attempt and they, through the voice of Miss Giddy, enunciate their refusal of the notion that they are Joe's "property". They stand in the film as a rejection of Immortan Joe's patriarchally controlling philosophy imagined as a way of life. In ecofeminist terms, they are reclaiming their humanity and refusing Joe's insistence on animalising them. In this respect, the hope of The Green Place and the Vuvalini represents a place to go to where an alternative, less alienating, philosophy appertains.

But The Green Place is gone, poisoned, soured. It is no more. Some Vuvalini survive, however. One even carries seeds in a bag in the hope of nurturing new life. At first, everyone determines to run away. Only oppression lies behind them and, if they have outrun it for now, they must keep going if they are finally to put themselves beyond its clutches. Max, as is his common preference, chooses to go his own way whilst Furiosa, the surviving Vuvalini and the now liberated ex-wives, head off across salt flats on motorbikes with supplies they reckon can last 160 days. But Max then has a thought and heads off after the women. He reasons that there is no reason to think they will ever find anything in the direction they are going. They have no idea what is out there. They might just as easily run out of supplies and find nothing (or find new trouble) as anything else. But what they do know is that behind them there is a Citadel with everything they need to keep them supplied indefinitely. They should go back, not forward. They should not seek to run

and hide. They should embark on an ecofeminist revolution which turns patriarchal control and scarcity into ecofeminist abundance and sharing. Following this philosophy, “The Green Place” is not now a deceased geographical location, it is a mobile and constantly regenerating philosophy. The Citadel can be another “Green Place” and there can be a “Green Place” wherever its values and relationships are brought to existence through the embodied lives which enable them. In *Furiosa* the story is about how the abducted title character has to fight to survive from childhood and through early adulthood in order to “get home” to the geographical place where she was brought up. But in the final act of *Fury Road* this becomes a mission to make The Green Place live again, and to make a new home for herself and others, in exactly the place that was formerly a centre of masculine control. This involves the renegade Imperator Furiosa herself, Max the recent Bloodbag, Nux the reformed War Boy, the rebellious ex-wives and the surviving Vuvalini. Anyone, in fact, who would join in against patriarchal tyranny which says things have to be that way when they don’t.

A major plot point in this final act of *Fury Road* is “redemption”. Of this Jacob Quick notes:

“The redemptive character arcs show that Fury Road is not a film about ‘women against men,’ but rather an epic tale of humans reclaiming their dignity in the face of rampant dehumanization. The women in the narrative not only insist that they are subjects in their own right, but they help humanize others by treating them with respect and dignity. Just look at Max and Nux: they were treated like animalized humans and acted accordingly, but their encounter with Furiosa and the other women empowers them to reclaim their humanity.”

This is a point important in the context of ecofeminism which, as suggested in the quotes I excerpted above, can be characterised by critics as maintaining harmful and unnecessary binaries by choosing to privilege the subdominant term rather than the dominant one. But that is not the case here and the final act of *Fury Road*, as the whole film itself, is falsely characterised if it is turned into a wooden narrative of “women versus men”. That, as we have seen in my earlier analysis of other essays in *Mad Max and Philosophy*, is not always a stumbling block others seem unable to avoid. But we should avoid it for it is completely unnecessary. The alternative to such antagonistic binaries is not reversing them as if anything had then changed but SUBVERTING THEM COMPLETELY. One imagines that the victorious Furiosa, being lifted up into the Citadel at the end of *Fury Road*, is not about to declare herself immortal and rule over the Citadel in Joe’s stead.

Instead, the suggestion is that, in coming back, the circumstances of everybody at the Citadel have now changed. No more will water be restricted (we see it cascading down at the end as now covered milkers stand by watching on) and no more will rule be authoritarian. We do not know what will happen next or for how long it will prevail. But we know that CHANGE has come. And that is enough for a beginning. This change came because a cabal of “not men” were prepared to turn around, head back, and face the need for change at the risk of their own lives. Is the message of *Fury Road* here that it will always take that? Perhaps this is then why the film (which is likely the current chronological end of the *Mad Max* sagas) ends with The First History Man: “Where must we go ... we who wander the Wasteland in search of our better selves?” The answer would then seem to be wherever we must go to take responsibility, own our agency and autonomy, and to fight the injustice which enslaves us. *We* must survive - and so survive as ourselves with values and meanings of our own choosing. These are our “better selves”.

Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga

The fourth and fifth films in the *Mad Max* series, it may be argued, are two parts of a self-contained story which concern the character Furiosa Jabassa, daughter of Mary Jabassa, an original inhabitant of The Green Place. If we switch these fourth and fifth films around, we have a complete chronological tale (reading these films in a chronological way, which we need not) which recounts the story of Furiosa, beginning with her being taken from The Green Place by random scavenging outriders who form part of Dementus' retinue, through the death of her mother at Dementus' hands when she tries to rescue Furiosa, her time with Dementus until he allows her to be acquired by Immortan Joe as possible future breeding stock, her escaping the attentions of Rictus and integrating herself surreptitiously into Immortan Joe's War Boy culture, her multiple escape attempts and pact with Praetorian Jack, their capture by Dementus (leading to Jack's murder), her escape from Dementus by cutting off her own left forearm (onto which she had tattooed a map to get back to The Green Place, a consistent desire of hers after her mother had made her promise to find her way back before going to her own death), her return to the Citadel and informing Immortan Joe of Dementus' plans for attack which led to the Forty Day Wasteland War and her chasing down, capturing and killing of Dementus before she became Immortan Joe's Imperator which would eventually lead to the events of *Fury Road* and her eventual "redemption" upon killing Immortan Joe and freeing the Citadel, and its resources, from his tyrannical rule. In all I have said about *Mad Max* so far in this book, I have had a lot to say about Max Rockatansky and even described his character and motivations, from my point of view. But what can be said, in the case of these latter films in the franchise, about Furiosa and her story more specifically?

"the manly woman was a creature born of the wasteland"

(Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*)

Before interpreting Furiosa in the two films which tell her story, let us consider women. Let us consider women and men. Let us consider women *vis-a-vis* men. I am going to make the case below, through detailed analysis of *Furiosa* and *Fury Road*, that the character Furiosa is almost entirely male-coded throughout these films. She is, in other words, exactly an example of *female masculinity*. What female masculinity is, or what it means, are both matters of dispute. What we can say, what Jack Halberstam (a trans man) does say in their book I have just quoted above, is that not very much has been said about it. (Although much more has been said about it since Halberstam's book was first written and published than was said about it before.) One doesn't need to think very hard to imagine why that is so. For a start, it concerns women and women are to be seen and not heard (or talked about except as objects of male imagination). Since "female masculinity" seems something to do with "manly women", this involves women speaking for themselves (at least in part) and that would require listening on the part of others. More than this, it would almost certainly seem to involve talk of lesbians or "the butch", the kinds of people who seemingly exist in a bubble where manly men are excluded, an area of discourse where manly men (and perhaps also feminine women) have no dog in the hunt. Indeed, consider the following from the same Jack Halberstam book in the preface to the twentieth anniversary edition:

"The butch is neither cis-gender nor simply transgender, the butch is a bodily catachresis. The Greek word, catachresis, means the rhetorical practice of misnaming something for which there would otherwise be no words. Butch is always a misnomer—not male, not female, masculine but not male, female but not feminine, the term serves as a placeholder

for the unassimilable, for that which remains indefinable or unspeakable within the many identifications that we make and that we claim. For Derrida, catachresis captures the inherent linguistic instability in all signifying practices and for Spivak it names the inherent colonial violence lurking in the practice of naming and identifying, systematizing and translating. And so, in this era of LGBT rights and recognition, let the butch stand as all that cannot be absorbed into systems of signification, legitimation, legibility, recognition, and legality."

I was happy to read this as I skimmed through Halberstam's book for some suggestive titbits to get my intellectual teeth into because, thinking about Furiosa day after day, watching the films day after day until it almost became a reflexive habit, it seemed to me that Furiosa is neither simply man nor simply woman. She is an unnameable, an anomaly, an impossibility if "man" and "woman" are the only two viable options. She is both but she is also neither. She is present on a gendered field of existence but she also refuses to show up on that same field. Women, most particularly in the world of Immortan Joe, as we have previously seen, are animalised things. They are milkers. They are breeders. Outside of this they do not exist (unless it is as one of "the Wretched" in the holes in the ground beneath the Citadel. But these are scarcely human beings at all). Yet Furiosa exists. She even exists in a senior and trusted position within Immortan Joe's military organisation as we embark upon *Fury Road*. *Furiosa* shows us that she earned that right (and respect) by dint of her own actions, first as nobody, then as a Dogman and stowaway underneath the War Rig, and then as a Praetorian – and this was by no means because of her femininity. She did it through actions alone in an entirely male-dominated context. Indeed, we might go so far as to say that *as a woman* she could never have risen to that position because *as a woman* that simply could not make sense. It is an unthinkable thought.

There is an aspect of necessity to this, then, if Furiosa would exist within Immortan Joe's organisation at the Citadel with any sort of agency whatsoever. Only men have any agency there. Women are either factory-farmed animals kept in captivity or useless to Immortan Joe but Furiosa (perhaps remembering something the History Man told her as a child in relation to Dementus) is "making herself useful" by other means. She subverts the gender script whilst being neither entirely male nor entirely female. Her usefulness as a capable human being proved entirely through deeds is enough. Yet, as butch, as one who queers the system, she is, as Halberstam suggests, catachresis, unnameable, a misnomer.

We are introduced to Furiosa (imagining that *Furiosa* and *Fury Road* tell one, chronological story for sake of interpretation) at the beginning of *Furiosa* where she is a Tomboyish girl who climbs rock faces and trees to pick fruit. Her friend Valkyrie is with her but Furiosa herself is clearly the dominant one. It is she who picks the fruit and it is she who engages the raiders who have slaughtered a horse when the two friends realise they are not alone. She attempts to sabotage their motorcycles but is caught and subdued. As they ride across the dunes through day and night Furiosa is not passive but resists by once again sabotaging a motorcycle. She tries to run away but is captured. She, and the raiders, are being pursued by her mother, Mary Jabassa, a woman capable with both machinery and weapons, traditionally male areas of endeavour. One of the raiders escapes Mary Jabassa's gun and brings Furiosa back to the camp of Dementus but Furiosa is still not passive. Aware that the safety of The Green Place relies on its non-existence to outsiders, she manages to strangle this raider, Toejam, before he can present her to Dementus and say where she came from. When he is finally brought into Dementus by one of his lieutenants, he bleeds out from a throat wound before he can draw an arrow in the right direction as Furiosa evades her captors briefly to kick at him even as he chokes to death on his own blood. Furiosa is clearly not one of those females taught to be seen and not

heard and we have already gathered from the shots of her mother and the Vuvalini in The Green Place that women take an active role in life in that community at all levels. The violence associated with protecting the community is not reserved for men in The Green Place neither is it assumed men are those best suited either to be “in charge” or to “take charge” in the case of emergencies. Furiosa has not been raised as a subservient woman in a patriarchy.

Furiosa is perhaps most feminine-coded during her brief time with Dementus where, after her attempted escape with her mother before the latter was caught, captured and killed, she spends her time posing as Dementus’ “daughter”, Little D. Here she is dressed most feminine and relegated to the status of “girl”, a person, so it is socially assumed amongst the Dementus Horde, of no agency (who also refuses to speak). Even here, however, Furiosa, by her actions, subverts this. For example, she borrows the History Man’s tattooing kit while he is sleeping and makes a star map on her left forearm in order to be able to guide herself back to The Green Place should a future opportunity arise to get back there. Not for the first or last time, we see that ingenuity and determination are part of her characterisation. She is also not afraid to act for herself and contrary to expectations as is shown when Dementus and Immortan Joe finally meet inside the Citadel. When the latter notices her she deliberately contradicts Dementus’ story about who she is and how she came to know him by telling Immortan Joe that she is not the daughter of Dementus and that the latter killed her mother. Taken by Joe in the deal to bring an uneasy peace between the two warlords, and placed with the current set of wives in the vault inside the Citadel, Furiosa again acts with ingenuity in order to avoid the predatory intentions of Rictus. Escaping, she insinuates her way into Immortan Joe’s War Boy military culture, distinguishing herself by her skill and bravery and becoming a Dogman. Once again, she is mute in this role (to hide her female identity, one assumes, in

a culture of all boys where women are farm animals) which all seems to be in order to fashion an escape attempt so she can get back to The Green Place. Throughout, and even as a child, she is portrayed as a person of agency with her own autonomy which, in such a context, is a masculine characterisation.

A War Rig is built and Furiosa spies an opportunity to escape. She stashes supplies and chains a motorbike to the underside of the War Rig and hides herself there so that she may try to escape during a run to The Bullet Farm. Things don't work out to plan, however, and Furiosa instead distinguishes herself as both a warrior and a person who acts decisively under pressure. She has made herself militarily useful which Praetorian Jack recognises after the attack by The Octoboss and his Mortiflyers has been repelled. This, in turn, must bring her to the attention of Immortan Joe and his own lieutenants on their return to the Citadel but *Furiosa* does not make us party to any of that. So we are asked to assume that although she, with her long, flowing hair, is obviously a girl, she gets accepted into the organisation of relationships on the say so of Jack alone since he wants her as his second in command. She also becomes a Praetorian. It would be interesting to know more about how that comes to be but *Furiosa* is an action/adventure film and we can only expect so much from it as a result. It is not a gender or queer theory lesson. This, however, is something of an unanswered question: how can Furiosa be accepted amongst this company in this place when she is clearly a woman and there are strictly defined gender/sex roles there? We must then assume that her abilities and personal characteristics speak for her as "male" qualities in a male-dominated world. As woman she would be useful only as a farmed animal. But as masculine she has different value. This masculinity is proved in the only way it could be for her: by her actions. (We may then further speculate that this is a situation analogous to that which allowed the masculine women Anne Bonny and Mary Read to become pirates on what were supposedly meant

to be all male – and male only – ships. They are exceptions which prove the rule even as they subvert it.)

Furiosa's relationship with the character Praetorian Jack is noteworthy in *Furiosa* – not for what it is but for what it isn't. This would normally be George Miller's opportunity to turn this relationship into a predictable romance. But he refuses the open door to it. He walks right on by. It is, as previously said, noteworthy that *Mad Max* as an entire franchise is rather sparse on romance and certainly on sex. Obviously, the franchise begins in tragedy when Max's own wife is killed by Toecutter's gang which sends Max mad. But, that aside, there really isn't that much sexy or romantic to say about *Mad Max* movies through five films (that there are couples in *Mad Max 2*, for example, being granted). If this isn't deliberate on George Miller's part it certainly seems to be. Why is there so little love in the Wasteland (and so little attention paid to it)? Furiosa and Jack, it seems to me, are shown more as those who put their trust in each other or who make a mutually beneficial pact (perhaps across gender lines, perhaps not) rather than as "lovers" (even though I have heard George Miller refer to the relationship in one of his interviews about the film as a "love story"). There's no sex scene, not even so much as a kiss between them. There is an intimate scene where Jack sews up a shoulder wound Furiosa received escaping a riotous Gastown and they make the Vuvalini touching heads gesture (which we also see between Furiosa and her mother and her mother and a Vuvalini general) which seems to indicate a bonded togetherness – but that's not exactly romantic as we might understand it. So how are we supposed to know this is a "love story"? Would this then code Furiosa as feminine again, imagining this within a heteronormative frame of reference? I take the view its not that simple. Even if George Miller thinks this is a love story that's not unambiguously what I as viewer see, not least given Furiosa's own characterisation which defies binary gender designation. Or are we meant to imagine it is so because Jack is a

man and Furiosa is a woman in a default to heterosexual stereotypes? If that is what is going on then it would be a most disappointing and unimaginative state of affairs.

In any case, vowing to escape together to The Green Place, Furiosa and Jack (its Furiosa's plan, Jack is invited along for the ride) put said plan into action. (Here it will turn out that, in the course of its execution, Furiosa, the woman, saves Jack, the man, in a role reversal when they need to escape from Dementus who has captured The Bullet Farm.) Eventually, however, Jack, the man, is captured and tortured to death by being dragged whilst Furiosa, the female-to-male-catachresis, is strung up to watch. Somehow (ostensibly by cutting through her own already damaged arm), she escapes. She was more man, because more capable, more tough, more resourceful, than Jack but she was also more female and so made to watch rather than just being dragged like Jack. Furiosa is also a warrior and her success in dealing with manly foes is the warrant of her own female masculinity. She returns to the Citadel to inform Immortan Joe of Dementus' treachery and he takes her word over the advice of his sons, lieutenants and allies. Meanwhile, she fashions, with some technical skill, a prosthetic arm which is both mechanical and hydraulic (more masculine technical ability?) and gives herself the much more masculine buzz cut that we are familiar with from the Charlize Theron portrayal of the character in *Fury Road*. Thereafter, the film now descends into the apparently manly business of war but Dementus is not finally tracked down and killed by Scrotus or Rictus, by The People Eater, The Bullet Farmer or a posse of obedient War Boys. Nor even is it Immortan Joe himself in what could have been portrayed as a testosterone-driven butting of heads. Instead, it is Furiosa who commandeers a car and literally hunts him across the desert and defeats him in single combat. Driving, shooting, killing, Furiosa has all the manly skills.

To this we may add leadership and taking responsibility when it comes to *Mad Max: Fury Road* where we find that Furiosa is now Immortan Joe's number one military figure (an Emperor, no less) in charge of actually doing stuff. (In *Fury Road* Scrotus is no longer around, Rictus is being dumb in the background and The People Eater has become boss of Gastown.) She is now in charge of the War Rig and drives it on supply runs. She can only have attained this position, as I have already suggested, because of her masculine success in what is an entirely masculine theatre of influence. To be feminine-coded in this environment is to be reduced to a farm animal. Farm animals don't drive War Rigs or become emperors. But Furiosa has and does. Yet she still harbours the desire to return to The Green Place and this time she is taking some of the captured women with her.

In this respect, George Miller has said something interesting. In talking about the plot of *Fury Road*, Miller once remarked that the Furiosa character had to be woman because if it were a man it would just read as one man stealing women from another man. It would become a patriarchal property dispute. This suggests that Miller does not want to present this reading in his story but to put forward another one, one of women's emancipation which women achieve by their own determination (one or two biologically male, but demasculinised, assistants like Max and Nux aside). But this is complicated by the characterisation of the Furiosa character that he has actually given us. Unless we are going to be crassly bioessentialist about this then Furiosa is not presented as simply and unambiguously female (as, say, Joe's "wives" are in their semi-nakedness which shows their value only as feminised sex objects to Joe). The only time Furiosa looks remotely "girly" in either of the films the character is in is the scene where she is presented as Little D by Dementus to Immortan Joe. The rest of the time she is either gender neutral or masculinised in clothing no different to that of her fellows in Immortan Joe's patriarchy. The only possible aesthetic concession to her sex is her hair (which Miller has revealed he

told Anya Taylor-Joy in *Furiosa* to keep long) which, having cut it off to escape Rictus, at first she hides and then later cuts off again the better to fit into Joe's cult. As the Emperor who serves Immortan Joe but who is also secretly taking his wives away from him (at their behest) and autonomously deciding to leave his service, she is dressed in a gender neutral way indistinguishable from her male peers. What's more, she is the boss of men and seemingly only answers to Joe himself. So if *Furiosa* "has to be a woman" to tell the story Miller wants to tell in *Fury Road*, it seems clear it is not necessarily a feminine woman. The lack of sexualisation and "love interest" is here also pertinent and so must be repeated again. This, I posit, is actually female masculinity. *Furiosa* is good at male things and might even kill you. Just like a man.

Or at least it would be "female masculinity" if we were using a Western gender binary as a frame of reference. But we have reason to believe that the Vuvalini (from what little we have seen of them) do not. For myself, I would tend to suggest they seem to have queered things (which means they have refused a patriarchal system of relations and chosen to fabricate their own). This is what *Furiosa* does too and in seeking to take the wives to The Green Place it is not so that they may be brood mares for someone else instead. It is an act which gives these women back their own autonomy and agency and removes from them the patriarchal burden of "being useful to a system" (being useful property) in order to deserve and be provided with an existence. *Furiosa* has, by her own female masculinity, found a way to get on in the patriarchal world she has found herself in. But she is not conformed to it, not even as one now immensely privileged within it. She still wants to escape, still wants to go back to the world of the values she still carries inside her where (I imagine) "female masculinity" makes much less sense as a concept because women and men are not thought of in The Green Place in the same ways as they are thought of in the Citadel. Different contexts, different cultures, bring differing

gender/sex conceptions and these are always matters of relations which comprise social systems. If the Citadel is about a dominating gender system, it is clear The Green Place was not.

Of course, culturally speaking, it is not unknown that women might fight, show courage or act boldly. Sometimes when they do this they are regarded as showing “masculine” qualities in a gender scheme which essentialises qualities into gender constructions (which, of course, shows they are constructions). Walter Duvall Penrose Jr’s book *Postcolonial Amazons: Female Masculinity and Courage in Ancient Greek and Sanskrit Literature* is an interesting and pertinent study into examples of this, foremost among them the referenced “Amazons”, a mythical tribe of female warriors that others more modern have mythologised in other ways such as that the character “Wonder Woman” is one of them. (Interestingly, it seems important for those bringing Wonder Woman to the screen that she is both an excellent, manly fighter but also stunningly beautiful and sexy as a woman. This is true of both the former beauty queen Lynda Carter version and the more modern Gal Gadot [who was once an actual active Israeli soldier] version.) Penrose Jr’s book grows out of his PhD thesis which covered “ethnic gendering of martial prowess” in ancient cultures and he notes The Amazons as “the formidable foes of the ancient Greeks [who] were the most notable example of warlike women in ancient Greek literature.” Referring to ancient Greek commentary from Lysias, he reports that:

“The Amazons were the daughters of Ares in ancient times who lived beside the river Thermodon. They alone of those dwelling around them were armed with iron, and they were the first of all peoples to ride horses, and, on account of the inexperience of their enemies, they overtook by capture those who fled, or left behind those who pursued. They were esteemed more as men on account of their courage than as women on account of

their nature [phusis]. They were thought to excel men more in spirit than they were thought to be inferior due to their bodies."

Note here that in *Mad Max* the Vuvalini had also tamed horses and were clearly also both skilled with weaponry and possessed of great spirit. (On the other hand, one of Dementus' gang, Mr Norton, was also a woman – and was actually played by Chris Hemsworth's real life wife, Elsa Pataky. The same actress also plays the Vuvalini who initially rides after the stolen Furiosa with her mother. George Miller regularly uses the same actor to play different roles in his films.) Penrose Jr tells us that "The idea of women fighting and defeating men and living independently of them lies at the heart of th[e] fascination with the Amazons" and this seems to elicit both various Greek opinions of them (depending on one's own appreciation of gender constructs and relations) and also the aforementioned "fascination". In these terms, Greeks can speculate on how The Amazons came to exist at all (they were ill-treated by men and so took action and refused patriarchy or they saw marriage as slavery and so refused it) and also on how they survived as a female-led and constituted tribe (by making conjugal agreement with the local Gargarians, taking the female children for themselves and letting the Gargarians have the boys). Penrose Jr adds here that "In the Greek mindset, Amazons were unmarried women. Generally speaking, when Amazons do wind up marrying men (or at least becoming their consorts), they cease to be Amazons." In the context of Furiosa (and the Vuvalini more widely) this is interesting as they are certainly not portrayed as traditionally married women. None of them seem to have a domestic male partner to submit to. This might then strengthen the view that Furiosa and Jack are not lovers and certainly that Furiosa, even in partnering with him, has not accepted his personal authority over her. And this seems to be how it plays out in their brief, and failed, escape attempt too. Penrose Jr adds here, pertinently, that "Amazons, it would seem, could not

exist unless they were sexually independent of or masters of men, although they do ally with men to fight” and that also seems to ring true of Furiosa and the Vuvalini as well.

An interesting aside here is that, historically, there are Greek sources which refer to Amazons “cauterizing their breasts” – as Penrose Jr puts this amongst lists of other markers of the masculine. One imagines this was done to emphasise the physical masculinity of Amazon women in contradistinction to femininity which would be marked by having noticeable breasts. Neither Charlize Theron nor Anya Taylor-Joy have particularly large breasts (though both have certainly appeared in public and in their work as “typically feminine” characters with hints of cleavage) and these are hidden even further by the ways they are dressed playing Furiosa – who is not at all a noticeably “breasty” character. In both cases, then, the Amazon and Furiosa, it seems a certain masculinity, or at least indeterminacy, is being aimed for, something which makes them an other to a feminised female norm. This is itself interesting in that Penrose Jr remarks that Amazons were seen by Greeks (not least Athenians) as an other to their normality. Thus, its most pertinent when in a further section of his introduction he writes that:

“The Greek understanding of the Amazons as masculine is, ultimately, an Orientalist interpretation. The Greeks did not understand a way of life that necessitated women riding, herding, and fighting. We do not know what nomadic women warriors would have thought of themselves, but we can and do see inconsistencies in Greek literature that describes such ‘barbarians.’ Whereas archaeological evidence of warrior women in Scythia and Central Asia suggests that women had more equality with men than in Greek societies, the Greeks understood such differences from within their own interpretive framework. Even the evidence that the Greeks provide does not necessarily reinforce their seemingly biased claims of dominant, matriarchal women effeminizing weak, ‘barbarian’ men. Some level of

ethnocentrism is involved in the discrepancy between the facts recorded by the Greeks and their interpretation of them."

Penrose Jr can rephrase this opinion (which is in line with Edward Said's thoughts about "orientalism" in his famous book of the same name and a more general "theorising of the other") shortly after this as "The Greeks filtered their understandings of non-Greek customs through their own misogyny" and highlights that The Amazons, absolutely as Furiosa and the Vuvalini, are cultural inventions. In the case of the Amazons this could arguably have been in order to bolster the view of barbarian (i.e. non-Greek) men as "effeminate" as much as anything else. (That their women dominate them is then an insult in Greek eyes whether based in fact or fiction or both.) As Penrose Jr then adds, "Because Athenians and other Greeks could not understand a society where men allowed women to fight or hold power, they assumed that women warriors either murdered or dominated men."

One might wonder the same about the Vuvalini but George Miller has so far been smart enough to leave the details shaded in mystery. It does, however, remind us that you can only see what you are capable of seeing. Things are not given but formed in matrices of cultural understanding. An example here might be given in the shifting interpretation of The Amazons, from Greek to Roman, according to Penrose Jr. Here he states that the Greeks saw them as the foremost examples of "female masculinity" whereas, "by the Roman era they had also become the prototype of matriarchy." In this way a band of random Furiosas become the Vuvalini.

There is more to it than this though and it bears on what I have said previously about Furiosa only being able to prove herself by, and through, her actions, these being things thought to reveal her character. Here Penrose Jr writes:

"Greek, especially Athenian, men tended to think that bravery, intelligence, outspokenness, and loyalty were male traits. When a woman exhibited these traits, she could either be called a 'man' [anēr] or 'masculine' [andreia, andrikē]. Because the ancient Greeks held so tightly to a gendered paradigm where these kinds of traits were considered 'masculine,' when they observed such traits in women, they labelled these women as masculine."

Commenting on the same lack of scholarly focus on female masculinity as Halberstam earlier attested to, Penrose Jr adds:

"The term 'masculinity' is derived from a set of behaviors, norms, and customs expected of men. Masculinity and masculine behavior have been noted in women for thousands of years; however, the study of masculinity in women has been stymied by a false understanding that masculinity is the product of men only and, therefore, is tied integrally to the study of men, but not women."

Here we hit upon the constructed nature of not simply the sociological phenomenon of gender but also the biosocial phenomenon of sex. Unfortunately, it is not my task here to trawl various literatures for references to cross-gendered and cross-sex expressions but they do exist. (See also my comments later on in regard to the views of my "Queers of the Apocalypse".) In the context of Penrose Jr's Amazon discussion and its relevance to me here in the context of the Furiosa character, it merely seems pertinent to point out that "female masculinity" is hardly a novel idea – and neither is having "biological women"

coded as “men”. But we should not imagine, as Penrose Jr points out historically, that people are bound to see the same things anyway:

“we must recognize that women who would have seemed ‘masculine’ to Athenians or other Greeks may not have seemed so to the locals among whom they lived or over whom they ruled. Gender roles are constituted uniquely in different contexts and periods, through a repeated performance that is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established.’ (Judith Butler) Such a set of meanings is not constituted in the same manner at all times, but changes as societies evolve, and varies among different societies existing at the same time. Whereas the Athenians conceived of masculine behavior and masculinity in women, their assessments were produced and reiterated in a society where strong binary oppositions were drawn between men and women. This does not appear to have been the case within some non-Greek and even some mixed Greek/barbarian societies. The day-to-day needs of nomadic life fostered less of a gendered division of labor than in Athens, and monarchical or tyrannical governments in other Greek-ruled locations allowed elite women to hold power that would have been impossible for women to attain at Athens.”

This leads to a further point Penrose Jr raises too, that there are always multiple female masculinities. The example Penrose Jr gives here, for example, is again similar to the case of Furiosa in that the female masculinity is not necessarily associated with sexuality. Much more common in both of these cases is that it is associated with qualities like “boldness, bravery, independence, loyalty, and intelligence” – all qualities Furiosa displays in abundance. A key Greek term here is *andreia* which means both “masculine” and/or “courageous/brave” equally in a way which equates these qualities and identifies them together. Ancient Greek men, as Penrose Jr reports, “associated courage with their own

sex, and a lack of courage, or fear, with women.” So if you displayed courage then you were *andreia*, masculine. The ancient world, as the Wasteland, was war and “War is the concern of all men” as Hector is made to say in Homer’s *Iliad*. Martial prowess, in the Greek world, was then a male characteristic and this, of course, once more implicates Furiosa who drives an actual War Rig. In the classical Greek era Penrose Jr tells us that “the virtue of the warrior (a masculine figure of course) came to be represented by [the] more specific term *andreia*.” Before this it had been “a specific type of courage that was associated with men”. In Greece, in fact, some, such as the historian Thucydides, saw such martial courage in women as “contrary to nature”. Like some ancient TERF, one can imagine (perhaps not altogether unhistorically) Thucydides haranguing ancient masculine females and accusing them of pretending to be what they are not. But are there things women are “meant” to be (or not meant to be)?

The point here would be, as Penrose Jr raises of Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon, that “‘sex’ is a category that is policed” in many cultures. And it is done so on a constant and necessarily ongoing basis. It is no more a “lesson learned” than it is something taught once for all time. As Penrose Jr says in his own discussion: “The establishment of manhood ‘is a continual dynamic process’ through which men legitimize their monopoly on power in the public arena.” Politics, too, was perceived by the Greeks as a man’s business so when Furiosa helps the rebellious wives escape she is once more stamping her own masculinity on the situation. Immortan Joe can’t let Furiosa take them or have them escape for the consequence is not merely a new lack of breeders but the destruction of the politics he had deliberately based his rule upon. Indeed, this “new politics” leads to his own demise as to the demise of his patriarchal politics.

Mad Max as Queer (Post) Apocalypse

It is often remarked that *Mad Max* (not least after the original film) is “post-apocalyptic”. But what does that mean? What is an “apocalypse”? As this term is used today (and in English, I cannot speak for other language users) it has evolved a secular meaning from one originally more religious. By “apocalypse” today most English speakers would understand some sort of violent disjunctive event (or series of events) which led to an eventual disruption and breakdown in presumed social and political normality and resulted in a different (and, one imagines, qualitatively worse) way of life (for those who were left, that is). It is quite often conceivable that this might implicate violence and war. This certainly seems the case in *Mad Max* where society, as it was before, has completely disappeared amidst talk of Oil Wars, Water Wars, nuclear blasts and environmental devastations. Communities as large as Sydney have been completely destroyed if *Beyond Thunderdome* is to be believed. Whatever people are left, where they are able to survive tumours, poisonings and the effects of all sorts of possible contagions, are scavengers at potential, and seemingly often actual, war with each other. Society according to a nominal “rule of law” as it was before has ceased to exist. “Post-apocalyptic” here means that the world of *Mad Max* is a post-civilisation world for “the apocalypse”, a disjunctive event, is now in the past.

But this is not what an apocalypse more originally was or had earlier meant. Take, for example, possibly the most famous apocalypse, the New Testament book known as Revelation, the final book of the Christian New Testament which talks of the battle of good versus evil, the victory of the Christian God and the creation of a new post-conflict heaven and earth. Now you may not realise but in the original Greek in which this book was written it is called “The Apocalypse”. The book of Revelation is “The book of the

Apocalypse” for “Revelation” is the English translation of the Greek word “Apocalypse”. An apocalypse is a revelation, a revealing, an imaginary of a new way of seeing things. More historically, Revelation itself, the book that is, is a Christian appropriation of a Jewish type of writing, part prophecy and part intellectual wisdom, in which historical events are interpreted symbolically for a theological and political purpose (in Jewish context these were often indivisibly entwined as we also see in the career of Jesus or the histories of either Josephus or the Maccabees, for example). There are numerous other Jewish and Christian (and even Islamic) apocalypses and they are all “revelation” in the sense just described and, so scholars now suggest, they are descended from even earlier forms of writing in the Ancient Near East in which narratological myths (often of imaginary or supernatural battles) are constructed in order to provide meaning to communal existence in terms of divine and human governance. As one major scholar of apocalyptic writing, John J. Collins, puts this in the introduction to volume one of the *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*:

“As a literary phenomenon, apocalypse has been defined as ‘a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.’ Such writings in antiquity are typically ‘intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and behavior of the audience by means of divine authority,’ and are often associated with groups in crisis.”

However, as Collins further relates in a general introduction to this encyclopedia as a three volume work with the editors of the other two volumes, Bernard McGinn and Stephen J. Stein:

"In modern scholarship apocalypticism has also been related to other terms, especially 'eschatology' (teaching about the last things), 'millennialism' or 'chiliasm' (belief in a coming better age on earth, such as that described in the thousand-year reign of Christ at the end of the book of Revelation), and 'messianism' (hope for a heaven-sent savior who will usher in the better age). Messianism is a distinct phenomenon, insofar as it focuses on specific savior figures. 'Eschatology' can be used for all sorts of human goals (e.g., national liberation) that do not necessarily qualify as apocalyptic, and millennialism is properly speaking a narrower concept that concentrates on earthly utopias. Nonetheless, all these terms overlap and are often used inter-changeably. The precise nuance given to them by a given author must be inferred from the context."

Clearly in *Mad Max* we can see that, historically and culturally, there has been more going on than a war or environmental collapse which leads to general destruction and everyone thereafter living in a wasteland. A more ancient sense of apocalypse is one which relays some kind of special revelation to earthly people about events, their meaning and possible outcome. A more contemporary and secular sense simply describes the fact or circumstances of a civilisational collapse, the unfolding of portentous events.

Mad Max, however, can blur the lines here. The kids who find Max in *The Nothing in Beyond Thunderdome* are waiting for a saviour, Mr Walker. They even assume Max is him until he vociferously persuades them that he isn't (before going on to save them anyway, at personal cost to himself, in a most Jesus-like and self-sacrificial way). Then of course

there is an actual “beast” (thinking in terms of the book of Revelation), Immortan Joe, someone who proclaims his own immortality, fights any challengers to his supremacy from up in his “heaven” on the Citadel and visits either destruction or life (in the form of food and water) on those below. This pseudo-divinity demands martyrdom of his followers (compare Revelation) and promises an afterlife in Valhalla (the hall of the heroic dead). Immortan Joe, in creating a religion and a mythology as a framework for living in the environs of the Citadel itself, certainly seems to have created a primitive type of apocalypse (in the religious sense) even as he is living after one in the modern, secular sense. If apocalyptic writing, in the more ancient sense, is what Richard J. Clifford calls “a kind of ancient ‘political theory’” in an article from the same referenced encyclopedia on the primitive roots of apocalypticism in Ancient Near Eastern myth, then Immortan Joe has himself certainly been busy writing his own myths as a political theory for his particular part of the Wasteland. It is even not irrelevant that several of these myths in much earlier, pre-apocalyptic, forms, according to Clifford, concerned water. And we know very well how associated with water Immortan Joe himself is.

In this apocalypse, however, things are not going to go to (Immortan Joe’s) plan (as you might already have ascertained from what was written above). Things are about to get very *queer*. But in order to discuss this further we need to discuss QUEER itself.

What, we might ask, is “queer”? Who is “queer”? Think about it for a moment. Ask these questions in public and you will get varying replies. For example, for a certain kind of (at least to himself) orthodox gay man, or gender critical woman (who may be lesbian or straight but is almost certainly also cis), “queer” defines a dangerous and abusive belief system which, for the gay man, originates in a slur (as, incidentally, does the word “gay”) and wants to eradicate him and all those like him and, for the woman, is that ideology

which “abuses kids”. But then you may find others for whom “queer” is simply a benign and shorthand way of referring to a collection of non-heterosexual sexualities, a useful umbrella term. Then there is the question of social, cultural and even political positionality. Does any given black trans lesbian view “queer” in the same way a straight white man would? Is “queer” a universalising term or something that, perhaps because of its origins and history, refuses universalisation? It seems clear to me from even the questions of this brief introductory paragraph that I must make the effort to take my own stand on such matters. Thus, in what follows I intend to give the (all too brief) details of my own relation to “queer”. This will necessarily make what follows a personal account. It claims no authority beyond this (and there are many others out there you can consult instead or as well). It claims only to articulate an understanding or, better, an approach that I have come to myself.

I understand “queer” in two senses:

1. Queer as a “theory”, a way of seeing, and so as an approach to thinking about things and the lives with which they have to do. This is called Queer Theory;
2. Queer as a (self-) description of people or things (i.e. I am queer, she is queer, they are queer).

These two senses of queer are likely in some sense related. One would imagine that one cannot see something or someone as “queer”, for example, unless this is a possibility within their intellectual apprehension and understanding of the world. But, equally, that one can conceive of queers does not necessarily mean that you are a savant of “Queer

Theory” (which I will come to shortly) and have an intimate knowledge of rarefied academic conversations that 99.99% of us are simply never privy to.

Where people are called queer (or call themselves queer) this is likely a reference to sexuality – or what, elsewhere, I might refer to as gender/sexuality. (We might talk here of non-standard or minority sexuality – the standard and majority sexuality being heterosexuality, of course – but this is to beg several questions I have no time to currently discuss.) Queer, for example, many would understand as an alternative word for “gay” or, perhaps in a less common way, “lesbian”. This is not necessarily the case, however, and from many angles. Some gays and lesbians *despise* the description “queer”. Some queers regard themselves as ontologically other in regard to gays or lesbians (or straights). In other words, the equation, where it is made, is always rhetorical. Such rhetorical disputes in fact lead us in the direction of discussing queer as theory for, to ask a pertinent question, what is “homosexuality” exactly? Once more, you will find differing opinions – and sometimes hot tempers in regard to them. Here is what Annamarie Jagose has to say on the subject in her book *Queer Theory: An Introduction*:

“While there is a certain population of men and women who may be described more or less unproblematically as homosexual, a number of ambiguous circumstances cast doubt on the precise delimitations of homosexuality as a descriptive category. For example, is the man who lives with his wife and children, but from time to time has casual or anonymous sex with other men, homosexual? Many men in this situation, when interviewed for the purposes of AIDS research, did not identify themselves as homosexual. One interviewee said of his sexual identity: ‘It’s not important to me. I do it with men on occasions. It’s more important that I am married and love my life. . . . It’s no one’s business what I do on my odd afternoon off’.”

Consider, further, the pertinent questions of David Halperin in his essay/dialogue “Homosexuality: A Cultural Construct. An Exchange with Richard Schneider” :

*“Does the ‘pederast’, the classical Greek adult married male who periodically enjoys sexually penetrating a male adolescent share **the same sexuality** with the ‘berdache’, the Native American (Indian) adult male who from childhood has taken on many aspects of a woman and is regularly penetrated by the adult male to whom he has been married in a public and socially sanctioned ceremony? Does the latter share **the same sexuality** with the New Guinea tribesman and warrior who from the ages of eight to fifteen has been orally inseminated on a daily basis by older youths and who, after years of orally inseminating his juniors, will be married to an adult woman and have children of his own? Does any of these three persons share **the same sexuality** with the modern homosexual?”*
(emphasis original)

Such quotations beg the question of what “sexuality” even is (not to mention how it is to be cross-culturally understood) and certainly question today’s suspiciously common notion (at least in “the West”) that it is the matter of an “orientation” we are “born with”, a sort of materialist and determinative fate we can do nothing about. (One thinks here, certainly with unpleasantness, of douchebags like Elon Musk who recently described his trans daughter as being “born gay”, perhaps as part of that gender critical conspiracy theory in which “the trans” are trying to “trans the gay away”.) Opposing such a view of biological predestination (I use the doctrinal religious term consciously) are those who view sexuality culturally, historically and sociologically. Such people, like the former sociologist John H. Gagnon, think of sexuality in terms of culturally-configurable and understandable preferences (ways of thinking or conceiving about biological and social realities which work in a given culture) rather than as fixed biological orientations

common to the species regardless of culture or thought. Such people are intellectually unconvinced there is much of a case for purely biological hard-wiring and are politically dubious that it is a desirable reality to wish for to begin with. (If gay, queer or trans are biological predestinations then some will easily imagine them as defects and cancers to be engineered away or, more viscerally, cut out. Or, if they can't be, of their hosts as literally and physically diseased and defective, things to be eradicated in an example of eugenic thought.) Such an attitude to sexuality begins to tiptoe into territory more fully exposed to view in Nikki Sullivan's *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* where one question Sullivan wants to put front and centre is if "queer" is a matter of being (static?) or a matter of doing (dynamic?).

In such a discussion a more open appraisal of "Queer Theory" becomes possible. But one should not expect a definition – for Queer Theory (as a kind of talk commonly called a discourse) tries its utmost to stay out of the definition and classification business. (That said, one Italian theorist, Lorenzo Bernini, defines queer as "'the theoretical deconstructionist awareness according to which every identity is built through cultural meanings endowed with a story, and as such they are mobile and alterable.' I then specif(y) that for me this constitute(s) above all 'an ethics, a way of being of the subject in relation to others'" in his book *Queer Apocalypses*, quoting himself from another book, *Queer in Italy*.) Bernini's definition is both interesting and suggestive but I am not blind to the fact that obtuse words like "deconstructionist" will make little communicative sense to people alien to something called "poststructuralism", yet another (often French) philosophical and cultural discourse (or series of discourses) which concerns itself with everything from the nature of language and human culture to questions of power/knowledge and the intellectual construction of the human being. Annamarie

Jagose, to go back to her *Queer Theory*, here references the following in her explanation of this:

(1) Louis Althusser's post-Marxian argument that we are "subjects called forth by ideology"; (2) Roland Barthes' "mythology" (from the book *Mythologies*, appropriately enough) that "our understanding of ourselves as coherent, unified, and self-determining subjects is an effect of those representational codes commonly used to describe the self and through which, consequently, identity comes to be understood"; (3) Psychoanalytic theories from both Sigmund Freud and his interpreter, Jacques Lacan, in regard to an "unconscious" and so "psychic processes of which an individual is unaware" but in which, anyway, identity becomes "a process rather than a property"; (4) The linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure in which language constitutes and creates differential significances rather than describing a pre-existing reality (suggesting it is a tool useful for the purpose of manipulating the world of our experience rather than a tool which translates hard reality into one for one correspondent linguistic representations of it); (5) The more obviously relevant (and more universally acknowledged) influence of the work of Michel Foucault (not least the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*) which denaturalises sexuality and makes it a discursive product rather than a natural condition or a fatality (as Bernini also suggests in his definition as one who has read and agreed with Foucault).

But where does this leave us? Going back to Sullivan's question of if queer is a matter of being or a matter of doing to finish off my brief orientation exercise, we find arguments here to the effect that "queer" is not a sexual identity at all but, instead, a sort of anti-identity, a refusal of discursive practices which would label sexuality, make it innate or essentialise it in any way. We might call this a "refusal to be limited to one object of desire

or one way of loving". Here we find that my first understanding of queer, as a matter of "Queer Theory", is very definitely something involved with the poststructuralism I recently referenced – and it takes on poststructuralist concerns, and logic, as it goes along. Most particularly, for example in the shape of the aforementioned Foucault, it denies objective, static or universalising truths, seeing knowledge as a matter of power and power's ability, and desire, to ossify. Consequently, things, not least people and their sexualities, become a matter of "discourse" and are rhetorical in nature. Such talk actually produces nature in this way of thinking in a world in which "the given" is equally imaginary and often used rhetorically to further human purposes. Bernini's "cultural meanings endowed with a story" begins to make more sense. Its all about what Foucault calls creating a "truth-effect", something we might easily argue Immortan Joe seems to know something about.

Queer, then, is the notion that there is no "true self", no "real sexuality". There are only constructions, ours and those of others, never forced to be the same. There are competing stories, differing ideas. There is difference, diversity, alterity, ambiguity. There are relations with others and systems of power. Queer rejoices in this as it has no wish to be pinned down, restricted, limited, held fast. Queer is nothing in particular, it is apophatic. You cannot say what it is. You can only say what it is not, what it eschews (the normal, the mainstream, the required, the expected). It is a strategy or an attitude rather than a description or classification. Bernini called it an ethic, a "way of being of the subject in relation to others", and I like that. I like it a lot. It is a refusal to be contained by the old labels, and old politics, of the past with, as Lisa Duggan notes, "the promise of new meanings, new ways of acting and thinking politically." I once read the slogan "Queer means attack" and hopefully this brief reflection, followed by your own, might indicate

why. Queer is a politics, it means “to fuck with gender” as a 1991 London pamphlet “Queer Power Now” once said. Queer means fluidity and autonomy of desire.

This might all come to some as a kind of intellectual apocalypse. It would probably come to Immortan Joe as one – but perhaps not to the Vuvalini who seem to have developed their own, possibly queer, politics. At the very least the Vuvalini have developed a politics of refusal – for they eschew the top down, male-led hierarchy of others. Theirs seems a very inter-relational “all for one and one for all” kind of mentality, a mentality of collective or social ethical responsibility. It is my suggestion that “the apocalypse” that has happened in the secular and physical world of *Mad Max* has led to more spiritual and intellectual ones, ones as different as that of Immortan Joe and that of the Vuvalini. (Here Bartertown is an example of simply trying to live as before with what is to hand and is, consequently, imagined as less transformative, less apocalyptic, even if chronologically post-apocalyptic.) Here I think it important to remember the earlier remark of Clifford that apocalypses, in the religious sense, can function socially as kinds of political theory and have political purposes in being authored at all. This brings them onto a parallel course with queer and Queer Theory which, for me at least, function similarly. Consequently, I think of *Mad Max* as a kind of queer apocalypse, a set of disjunctive events which have changed how people see themselves and their relations to others and produced a new dispensation. I can even imagine how the Wasteland becomes something better than the civilisation that preceded it as you may have seen hinted at at the start of my discussions at the head of this queer apocalypse when discussing anarchy.

This will be a hard thought to swallow for those brainwashed to accept that modern, Western, capitalist civilisation is the imagined standard to aim for and the appropriate measure of lived communal human existence. I take the view it isn't and that, in fact, it is

considerably flawed and even considerably and deliberately harmful. If you compare Western modernity with the Wasteland you will surely see differences but do you see how Immortan Joe is not so different from Andrew Tate, Elon Musk or Donald Trump? Do you see how in the Wasteland any remnant of centralised control has gone? Do you see how in the Wasteland globally organised exploitation of things as resources has now been made impossible? Human relations have been interrupted and reordered by *Mad Max's* apocalypse – but that is what apocalypses (secular or religious) do: they act as a reset button (but not necessarily as one which sets things back to zero). That may be bad for those enslaved as milkers or breeders or for those pursued by the likes of the Lord Humungus and his gang but it is also the situation which enables a widespread freedom to live and act for oneself that many of us should rightly be envious of (even as many others of us work daily to deny it to us). For someone like me who believes that ANY government is both illegitimate and a necessarily *violent* imposition then the no government (or very local and contingent government) of the Wasteland is not necessarily a step down from where we find ourselves today. There are possibilities of autonomy, liberty and freedom of association in the Wasteland that would be hard, if not impossible, to find in the world we have made for ourselves today. Perhaps this is also why sometimes even anarchists tell apocalypses where beasts fight each other to establish their dominion and slay the other one?

Queer, however, is almost certainly not about the hegemony of “the queers”. The Vuvalini, for example, had The Green Place (until it became poisoned and died) but they didn't seemingly want to conquer elsewhere. They weren't about dominion but sisterhood. We could not say the same for Dementus or Immortan Joe whose conception of human relations is both different and contrary to theirs. The apocalypse has led to different outcomes for different groups – as apocalypses are often likely to do since

these things often contain the designated groups of the saved and the damned. In this apocalypse from George Miller, however, one must work one's own salvation – if often together with others. This is how those in the compound in *Mad Max 2* escape to the north, how the kids (and Master) escape in the plane in *Beyond Thunderdome* and how Furiosa, Max, Nux and the surviving Vuvalini destroy “the beast” Immortan Joe and bring a salvation from his mythological politics to the Citadel. Crucially here, in this “post-apocalyptic” world, they are endowed with freedom to act. They are, of course, not immortal. They are not invulnerable. Turning around and taking on Joe and trying to capture the Citadel (of heaven) is not a choice without risk or consequences. Some of them die and others are gravely injured. But no apocalypse worth the name tells its tale without the spilling of blood. Just read Revelation to find that out. Grounded in very political realities as apocalypses are, their writers know well that freedom and liberty more often than not have a blood price. They are about real stakes and real lives, about real freedoms and escaping the real lack of them. It can't always be a god who saves you from “the beast”. Perhaps you will have to save yourself and work your own “salvation” (which Max, Nux, Furiosa, Immortan Joe's ex-wives and the surviving Vuvalini do in *Fury Road* each in their various ways). In the end, *Mad Max* is asking us questions about the world, how we live, how we relate and what is good and bad for that, throughout its series of sagas. It asks what we would do if we woke up and suddenly the world we knew had gone away or gone to shit. It asks us what we would do if how we had lived had made the world we knew go away. (Of course, it also suggests that, even now, we are making it go away too and so we had better watch the fuck out.)

In its last two episodes to date, *Furiosa* and *Fury Road* (to give them an imagined chronological order), we can then perhaps see George Miller being more deliberately apocalyptic than he was before. The first three films in the series are basically stand alone

films with no real thought of telling an overarching story. I in fact, perhaps like many others, saw *The Road Warrior* and *Beyond Thunderdome* without ever having seen the original film (which I only saw for the first time in 2024). Watching that for the first time recontextualised Max for me quite a lot. But one didn't need to have watched it for one could go straight to *Mad Max 2* and just accept that they all live as scavengers in the desert and battle for resources. It is a self-contained film which works on its own much as the third film does too. But with the fourth and fifth films (which synchronise up even to the extent of containing multiple repeating characters and the exact same word for word prologue as part of the opening titles which explains what has happened to cause the Wasteland) George Miller seems to want to tell a more connected story. We can really see this story, putting *Furiosa* before *Fury Road*, as a story of two ways of life in opposition to each other in a sort of combat myth (combat myths, the *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* informs us, were Ancient Near Eastern narrative precursors to apocalyptic narratives in which great symbolic beasts like Leviathan or Behemoth or Tiamat would do battle in such a way as to "make sense of" the natural and political world). Miller, perhaps woodenly, seems to make these two sides doing combat a hierarchical male domination and a female cooperative self-determination, typified in the examples of Immortan Joe and Dementus for the former and the Vuvalini (of which *Furiosa* is one) for the latter. Thus, from the beginning of *Furiosa* to the end of *Fury Road*, we can see this apocalyptic battle play out – in the favour of the latter and as a somewhat instructional tale. For do the story tellers think one of these ways is better, and has better outcomes, than the other? Certainly they do. We might even see it, in a way very much in line with the function of apocalyptic, as a "story of us" and how "good" must overcome "evil" in the end.

Here Miller takes what I am calling the queer side for it is the side that is contrary to, and counters, the male-led, violent hierarchy of Immortan Joe and Dementus. I started off this topic on *Mad Max* talking about anarchy as a self-determinist, voluntarist thing, a self-obligating thing, and that plays into my sense of queer here as well. Queer is about the rejection of domination. It wants to flip the script or subvert the story. It insists on alterity and demands ambiguity and fluidity. It wants and needs freedom to define itself, refusing classification or politically motivated ordering as it does. As a way of being in relation to others, it must develop its own politics and define itself. This is exactly what happens to create the Vuvalini in the first place (who must reject dominance and hierarchy to be who they are) and in the narrative events of the *Furiosa-Fury Road* story in which, at Max's suggestion, they turn around and head back to the Citadel to confront their own reality head on. This latter story, centred around the masculine female Furiosa, that George Miller tells in the more modern iteration of *Mad Max* is then a story of great beasts in conflict, the outcome of which will give both a meaning and a politics to the people of that world. As "queer", the Vuvalini want to fuck with the gender-based hierarchies of others in pursuit of a different, more self-actualising, polity and now I want to go on to discuss a further story which, I think, is doing much the same thing.

(B). V for Vendetta

Imagine that the apocalypse which hit Australia, in the southern hemisphere, turning it into the Wasteland, is actually the same apocalypse which has afflicted the world in the opening chapters of Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* where we learn that some kind of nuclear war has apparently destroyed both Africa and mainland Europe whilst Great Britain (a misnomer if ever there was one) still survives, if only now under the authoritarian grip of the fascist Norsefire. Alan Moore has written of his naivety in the

scenario he painted in this story (he assumed that a nuclear war, or even a nuclear winter, was survivable when it would surely be more complicated than that) but we can run with it nevertheless for discursive purposes much as we have to accept the unclear circumstances which lead to the Wasteland and *Mad Max*. Moore's story is, in the sense it was in *Mad Max*, then also another kind of post-apocalyptic tale but this is not one of the world apparently descending into chaos. To the contrary, Moore tells the story of a society tightly controlled by fascists in which chaos is to be absolutely avoided according to both the antagonists *and* the protagonist.

On one level *V for Vendetta* (V4V) is a story told to present the reader with one simple question: fascism or anarchy? At the time Moore was writing this comic book he wrote an essay about how it was written in which he says that the only real political question which matters is "Should there be leaders or not?". He then goes on to say that V4V is about this "Fascism or anarchy?" question and that this question is what is being addressed in the story. The story itself tells a tale about Britain (it is an explicitly British story and meant to be rather than an "anywhere" kind of story or set in some generic place) after nuclear conflict in which Britain has been miraculously (and probably unrealistically) spared any bombs. Other places are regarded as destroyed by nuclear devices but the wider world picture is thereafter barely addressed. Britain, which initially fell into chaos, is now ruled by fascists who use surveillance and violence to create a very deliberately ordered society based on the will of the fascist Norsefire organisation led by Adam Susan. Various influences affect the depiction of this from the Nazis and the Stasi to George Orwell's depiction of a totalitarian world in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* to Huxley's depiction of the something similar in *Brave New World* (this is not an exhaustive list).

A concise overview of the story is as follows (I am here addressing the book only. The film is nothing to do with this and is ignored): Evey Hammond is a 16 year old girl who is trying sex work for the first time. She is doing this out of need for money having lost her mother, who died, and her father, who was taken away by the authorities for past socialist tendencies. She has since worked in a factory but this has not proved sufficient. In desperation, she tries to sell herself as she has heard other girls do. But she is not very good at it and the first man she approaches to drum up some business turns out to be a member of The Finger, a secret police-like arm of Norsefire, and both he and his colleagues, who are nearby, become aggressive towards Evey and it is suggested they are about to rape her. It is at this point that we are introduced to the titular "V" (which is not this person's name but merely the symbol by which they are known. This character never offers or reveals their name, their lack of identifiability being a part of both the plot and the point) who swoops in to save Evey, killing some of the men in the process. V takes Evey back to his lair or hideout which is full of books, art and music in what one imagines to be a commentary on the fascist approach to culture and particularly its control or denigration. (One can here easily think of people like Joseph Goebbels talking about *Entartete Kunst* – degenerate art – things like Jazz music or works which depict undesirable political values. OR one could just think of some modern day Americans who like to ban anything they don't like.) V is here clearly put forward as one who values and preserves diverse cultural works of art as an aspect of how he sees the world and Norsefire (fascism) does not.

The rest of the first third of the book (which is written in three parts, each with multiple chapters) is taken up with establishing the world and its context. Here we learn of the nuclear war and how Norsefire came to be. We learn they instigated a surveillance society (like the Stasi or *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* with its listening devices) which is very much based

on violence and proactively removing undesirable elements from circulation. This involves the creation of “resettlement camps” where imagined political radicals or racial and sexual minorities might be sent. We learn that V was one of these people and was sent to the Larkhill Resettlement Camp (but without telling us which, or how many, of these groups he might have been implicated in). However, it seems that by gaining the trust of some of the staff there, where V and others were medically experimented upon with “hormones”, he managed to accumulate the resources to break out of the camp and destroy it. Thereafter, it is revealed that he (V is referred to in the story by people who have seen him explicitly as a man and so I follow that direction) has hunted down the remaining staff who survived and killed them one by one. He only has a few left to kill when we meet him in the story and he involves Evey in one of their deaths (a paedophilic bishop who was the former camp’s padre), much to her objection. This introduces an argument within the book about the use and validity of violence. V kills seemingly without qualm in relation to his motives whilst Evey does not wish to do so.

The middle section of the book is, understandably enough, the heart of the story. In it we are given more detail on the various “sides” of the fascism or anarchy story. Notable here is that the fascist side is a world of men. Women are here very much in the background (even if some, like the scheming Helen Heyer or Adam Susan’s eventual killer, Rosemary Almond, have sublimated agency behind the scenes). V, already introduced in a very performative way, is revealed further as a very performative character. He is also an intellectual character, depicted in a very emotionless way, who is all about ideas and getting them across. This is not simply to society in general but also to Evey in particular. However, this section starts with him throwing Evey out of The Shadow Gallery, which is what he calls his lair and which is located in a now abandoned Victoria Station in London. Evey is, at first, distraught at this but she soon meets a man called Gordon who takes her

in and over months they become romantically entangled in an apparent version of a “normal” life.

Unfortunately, however, Gordon is involved in murky ways with thugs who work for Norsefire and these eventually kill him, leaving Evey alone yet again. Evey, who has previously eschewed violence, now determines to kill his killer with Gordon’s gun but is stopped from doing so by V who captures her and places her in a reconstruction of resettlement camp conditions where Evey, to all intents and purposes, imagines she has been captured by Norsefire and is to be punished for being V’s accomplice and for the attempted murder of Gordon’s killer. This, however, is finally revealed as an elaborate hoax on V’s part in an attempt to push Evey psychologically to a place where nothing else matters but her freedom to have her own integrity, regardless of circumstances or consequences. When she reaches this point, V ceases his subterfuge and Evey learns the truth of what has been happening to her. She has a transformative experience as a result much as V informs her he had done whilst at the real camp.

The third and final section, *The Land Of Do-As-You-Please*, sees Evey reintegrated into V’s world but now more understanding of his philosophy, purposes and values. It is here we learn of the importance of the “idea” of anarchy and not least that, in a world where this idea was identifiable with certain people, the people would simply be identified and killed, also seemingly killing the idea. (This seemingly explains why V was killing off the former staff of Larkhill. They could identify him. The logic of this is also borne out serially in anarchist history, where known anarchists were serially hunted and tracked, sometimes over decades, and so makes perfect sense.)

Thus V, whoever V is, must never be identified for the idea he performs and preaches will always be more important and the identities of its agents are only irrelevant distractions. His plan is revealed, at the beginning of this final part, where he blows up “The Ear” and “The Eye” (the various parts of Norsefire’s authoritarian operation are given the names of body parts as it attempts to embody itself in society) and it is shown that he has had access to Norsefire’s main computer, “Fate”, all along, thus being able to anticipate their every move and plan his own traps and ambushes to boot. V describes his philosophy here as one of the destruction of the apparatus of evil before the people at large are presented with the intellectual choice of simply allowing it to be built back again or choosing a different path. V, thus, and certainly in his own mind, is not trying to force anything on anybody. He is simply creating the political conditions in which people, in his mind, can choose for themselves. This necessarily involves destruction and some death (for the fascists believe in no such freedom to choose) but is not intended to do so going forward habitually.

In the course of this final part V is shot and killed by Finch, a Norsefire detective who has been working throughout the book to discover V’s history, motives and identity. Finch eventually tracks him down to the station and shoots him whereupon Evey is presented with the dilemma of what to do next. Norsefire’s leadership, meanwhile, is rapidly disintegrating, not least due to the machinations of V, which have crippled its operation and have a destabilising effect on the personalities involved. These all inevitably turn on each other in their various squabbles and struggles for power and to be as near to the top of what will be left of the heap as possible.

This results in Adam Susan, the leader of Norsefire, being shot by the wife of one of his former operatives, and the seeming dissolution, at least on a temporary basis, of the

leadership of the organisation as a whole. All this gives Evey Hammond, now taking on the persona of “V” for herself, an opportunity to use Norsefire’s own propaganda technology to broadcast the message of anarchy in place of fascism, of no leaders and self-organisation in place of coercive authority, to the people at large. This is left as an open invitation in the book because, of course, it is being presented as a live question for the reader through the narrative. The last we see of Evey is then her back in The Shadow Gallery with a seeming new recruit, much as she was at the beginning, who must take their own journey of re-education and rethinking from a fascist reality to an anarchist consciousness. This, of course, is then also the journey the story hopes the reader will take as well.

V for Vendetta: Fascism, Anarchy, Violence, Queer

In my reading of this story in the context of this chapter I have been thinking about it in connection with four particular subjects – fascism, anarchy, violence and queerness. Consequently, what I want to do now to further and deepen my discussion of V4V - so we can then discuss its motifs and themes and emphases in relation with those from *Mad Max* - is discuss four questions. These are as follows:

1. What is fascism in *V for Vendetta*?
2. What is anarchy in *V for Vendetta*?
3. What is the place of violence in *V for Vendetta* and how is it used by fascism and anarchy? (Sub-question: how might we relate violence to anarchy more generally?)
4. How does the notion of “queer” affect *V for Vendetta* and how is it involved in the story?

Exploring these questions we will be better placed to discuss both stories together and to point to things we can learn from the discussion of them. So to my first question:

1. What is fascism in *V for Vendetta*?

V4V is not some dense political book or pamphlet. It is not a politics textbook or an encyclopedia of political thought and theory. The ideas are drawn with broad lines rather than fine detail. Alan Moore can certainly write stories that are about fine detail and that are works for the classroom (famously, his story *Promethea* is exactly such a didactic book of comic art and a book like *From Hell* is forensic in its research and creation) but V4V is not necessarily one of them. As Moore has himself admitted to certain naiveties in his formation of the ideas that go to make up the story of V4V I think we can forgive him if not everything is perhaps fleshed out or described as fully or as meaningfully as it should be. For example, compare Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* with V4V and the former seems more politically worked out than the latter. V4V seems to be somewhat skipping over the surface by comparison. But that's OK so long as we get the point.

Norsefire are presented in V4V as a fascist organisation. How do we know they are fascist? What are Moore's markers of its fascism? Well, first of all, Norsefire construct a deliberately created and maintained social and political order. (In this respect we could point out they are much like any government with only the degree of zealotry in doing so, and the coerciveness of the society thus created, being points of difference. Moore would surely find this relevant.) This includes the non-negotiable and forced removal of undesired elements (it should go without saying that Norsefire is presented as racist, homophobic and dehumanising – and even in its slightly more sympathetic characters who are presented as weak, easily-led and without the ethical or intellectual conscience

necessary to question their own behaviour) and its constant surveillance with cameras and listening devices. A more metaphorical example is that their main computer, which they use to determine the future according to the calculations it spits out based on the information fed to it, is called "Fate" and their propaganda broadcasts are called "The Voice of Fate". The idea here is obviously to spread the consciousness that society just must be this way so that no one will resist it. Doing so, the population will essentially be turned into sleeping policemen who monitor their own society on behalf of Norsefire. People will have to fear being "grassed up" or "turned in" by their now indoctrinated neighbours – as the very important character Valerie (a lesbian) is by her former lover Rita. (I will come to Valerie in more detail soon.) This ideology is eulogised by the leader of Norsefire, Adam Susan, in the first part of the story where he introduces himself as a believer in fascism, a Roman ideology symbolised by bound twigs. Susan talks of the necessity of strength and unity (and strength in unity) even if this must be a forced unity. Consequently, the enemies of this fascist mentality are freedom and liberty and luxuries, things that must be denied as a price worth paying by all.

A notable point here, one which must be deliberate on Moore's part, is Adam Susan's admission that he is not loved and, what's more, that he has "never" known love. In this void, he substitutes "fear" and "respect" but it doesn't seem coincidental that Moore raises this. Indeed, if we fast forward to another of Moore's stories, the pornographic (his word) tale *Lost Girls*, we find an entire story about sex and love in which those physical and emotional realities are sharply contrasted with those of violence, authority and war. In fact, I don't think it would be too harsh to say that where, in V4V, the story is about "fascism or anarchy?" in *Lost Girls* it is about "war or sex?" in a completely similar way. There is obviously a lot going on in these simple binaries – and a lot going on to inform them – but I think it does reduce down to something like that – and in a way in which, in a sense,

the same story is simply being retold. In V4V, certainly, fascism is presented as a very loveless thing in which the leader has never known love and the various lives of certain of its operatives are loveless too. It is instead about brutal efficiency, ruthless violence and a desire for power over others in a world in which one must take the side of either violence or love. Adam Susan has not known physical, bodily human love but, instead, he talks about his computer as the object of his love. But his computer is only a tool for violently and coercively organising the relations of a whole society. (This contrast of fascism and anarchy, war and love, also extends to the depiction of V in the part one chapter, "Versions". Here V blows up the Old Bailey but not before lecturing the statue Lady Justice on her ways, typified [somewhat questionably!] as a matter of sexual betrayal in that her justice is now a fascist justice. She has, so it is presented, betrayed her original beloved, Justice, for fascism in an act of unfaithfulness. As "punishment" for her "crime", V essentially destroys her. What lesson is that giving us?)

The violence and authoritarianism of the fascist Norsefire regime as an example of the story's dissection of human beings themselves is demonstrated in various examples. One is when Delia Surridge, the doctor who formerly oversaw the medical experiments on patients at Larkhill, recounts the story of an electric shock experiment in which volunteers were ordered to shock someone in another room with increasing intensity. The apparatus was real but wasn't really connected to another person. Instead, an actor shrieks and mimics the pain. A majority of volunteers continued to shock the apparent screaming victim even after they ultimately fell silent. What Delia Surridge takes from this is that people are flawed at a deep level if they will just do what authority tells them to and even enjoy it. Moore agrees with this, of course (for its his point, after all), and goes on later in the story to give a brief dissertation on authoritarianism and its inevitably destructive outcomes. When Creedy recruits the Scottish thug Ally to organise some bully

boys Moore ironically muses on “the side of Law and Order” resorting to violence to maintain its authority. But this violently enforced, authoritarian “order” (Moore thinks order more properly the domain of anarchy, as we will see) is notably without “justice, love or liberty” and, as Moore goes on to say over images of Conrad and Helen Heyer engaging in their frustrated and loveless life:

“Authority allows two roles: the torturer and the tortured; twists people into joyless mannequins that fear and hate, while culture plunges into the abyss. Authority deforms the rearing of their children, makes a cockfight of their love... Authority’s collapse sends cracks through bedroom, boardroom, church and school alike. All is misrule. Equality and freedom are not luxuries to lightly cast aside. Without them, order cannot long endure before approaching depths beyond imagining.”

The emerging picture of fascism in V4V, therefore, is one of violence and authoritarianism, of surveillance and propaganda. It relies on the victimisation, dehumanisation and incarceration of its designated enemies and a strong sense of societal unity even if this has to be violently manufactured. What is produced is a culture of fear and a confrontational context of authorities and those under authority which, Moore suggests, can never last indefinitely as its inherent tensions will inevitably destroy it from within. And all this is done in a way that is loveless, sterile and dogmatic, without any concern for people as people or for society as a place where love might flourish between people. It is a plan to be executed for unquestionable reasons rather than a means of human growth or pleasure.

2. What is anarchy in *V for Vendetta*?

Anarchy, in many respects, is presented (perhaps too simplistically) as the mirror image of fascism in V4V even as V himself is presented as the mirror image of Adam Susan. Here both have an implicit commitment to a belief and both carry out the consequences of that belief unswervingly and largely without emotion – albeit that V claims to “love” Evey several times (not romantically or physically but in a more “concerned and caring” kind of a way that would be impossible for the fascists). We might imagine that, in making this explicit, Moore is arguing that anarchy is a matter of such love.

But, if such love is a component of this anarchy, it is not the only thing. Another, perhaps surprising, aspect is violence and destruction. I shall discuss the violence aspect more completely in my next point but, when it comes to destruction, V makes it quite clear that, in a circumstance of coerced societal control, it is necessary to destroy or attack the power of that control before one can build more peacefully and cooperatively on the ruins. Thus, V can talk about “the flames of freedom” when blowing up the Old Bailey and regard that building, a famous court of law, as symbolic of a duplicitous justice that is no longer free – and so as something that needs to be destroyed. V sees no ethical barrier to such destruction within anarchy itself but can, later in the book, concede that such activity is only appropriately contextualised as action against coercive power. Where that power no longer exists, destructive action would lose its correct purpose.

Such destruction is itself part of a more important aspect of the anarchy with which V has to do – responsibility. For V anarchy is an action and that action can be summed up as “taking responsibility for oneself” personally and collectively. This, for example, is the point of the whole of chapter four of part two – “A Vocational Viewpoint” – in which V invades a TV studio, captures the broadcast signal, and broadcasts a message in which he essentially tells the people at large that they have allowed others to take responsibility

for, and direct, their lives. This, in V's recitation, has led to horror after horror and a coercive, almost self-abusive, situation. V reminds the people here – much like Dementus tried to in *Furiosa* when first approaching the Citadel and addressing the assembled War Boys – that it is they who, collectively, are the seat of power, the engine of power, the ones who constitute a power as it actually exists by either giving it their support or opposing it. Dementus encourages the War Boys to “throw down your leaders”. Here V educationally informs the viewers that they are responsible for the leaders they allow – or elect – and so for all that follows socially and politically as a result. It is in their hands and they are the ones who can do something about it for without them such power would be unsustainable and without material foundation.

V, who in his dying speech tells Evey that he conceives of the people's task as “to rule themselves, their lives and loves and land”, consequently conceives of anarchy as “taking responsibility” – but in a completely voluntarist way. We see this, for example, in the phrase he utters to Evey (who, by this point, wants to assist V) when he states, “No deals Evey, not unless you want them”. Here V indicates that his understanding of anarchy's human relations is entirely voluntarist: one can only bind oneself and “taking responsibility” in this anarchist way V understands is exactly found in doing such a thing. This then goes into forming the final appeal that V – now played by Evey – gives to the people at large at the end of the book where she offers them the “chains” of giving their responsibility for themselves and their relations away again or the opportunity (and responsibility) of creating “lives of our own”. V in *V4V* very much puts people's lives in their own hands according to a script in which they simply gave them away and lazily declined responsibility for them, an action which fatally changed society and enabled all kinds of destructive, exploitative and coercive behaviours and practices. Only by re-finding their self-responsibility, by re-discovering the liberty of self-obligation (and the

illegitimacy of external obligation), does V imagine society at large can awaken from its nightmare as a society of arbitrary and loveless forced relations.

Consequently, V's anarchy is "The Land of Do-As-You-Please" and not as someone else pleases. Quoting Aleister Crowley a couple of times, the phrase "do what thou wilt" also comes up in relation to this as well. This is not imagined as a chaotic free for all, however, for whilst Moore in his story conceives that "anarchy" is certainly a place of "no leaders", it is not consequently also a place of no order. Indeed, this has already been addressed in the terms of the book under the concept of taking an entirely voluntary responsibility for things. Moore here conceives of anarchy as a collective voluntary order, one to which people bind and obligate themselves in a way which dispels the chaos that could exist in lieu of life having an externally mandated direction or purpose. It is the insistence of V4V, however, that it is we who give this to ourselves. Consequently, the book talks of several "awakenings" to this reality (V himself, Evey under V's subterfuge which brings her to a point of transfiguration, Eric Finch's as he investigates V). In the latter case there the crucial thought is "Who is controlling and constraining my life except me?" and this is the realisation that the character V wants people to have for themselves. Our lives are up to us, we can do what we want, we do not have to acquiesce to the plans of others. Consequently, life under anarchy is not chaos, it is voluntary, self-obligating order. It is for this realisation that V is happy to go to such extremes to precipitate it for he imagines that this changes life completely and for the better.

3. What is the place of violence in *V for Vendetta* and how is it used by fascism and anarchy? (Sub-question: how might we relate violence to anarchy more generally?)

Violence in V4V is actually perhaps a bigger question than readers might imagine, and also one at the heart of anarchy as a subject. It is also a subject that readers of the book have discussed for nearly 40 years since they wonder how V can be so violent in blowing up public buildings, killing and murdering people without qualm and coercively dealing with Evey to the point of seeming torture – all whilst embracing a philosophy imaginably concerned with mutual cooperation, care, and love. The book does answer all these questions but, of course, whether you find the answers it gives satisfactory or not is up to you.

V takes the view in V4V that enemies are to be attacked, destroyed and, if necessary, killed. (This seems reasonable for what is the alternative? Hoping that they spontaneously just give up and go away? Doing nothing and simply acquiescing to the other side's systematic violence? That's not a very realistic, and certainly not a very anarchist, attitude to have.) Some of V's killing is done because those he kills can identify him and so undermine his plan to present the people at large with the opportunity to embrace anarchy. Others he kills are killed because they get in the way of him doing that (the guards at the Bishop's residence, for example). V is also not the only one who would kill. Evey determines to kill her lover Gordon's killer in the second part of the book, taking Gordon's revolver to accomplish the deed, but she is stopped from doing it by V before she can achieve her aim. We might observe here, however, that on the side of anarchy, primarily exemplified in the character of V, violence is used only for specific purposes rather than being an habitual or settled or cursory form of action. V wants to achieve a situation in which people can decide the course of their lives for themselves. Thus his violence is directed to that aim and, as part three of the book confirms, would stop in a situation in which that choice had been presented. V then seems to know full well that there is no anarchist future in *permanent* violence. That, in fact, is behaviour more consistent with

the fascist presentation and demeanour of Norsefire. They do you violence habitually and violent coerciveness is their consistent and permanent means of getting what they want, a political context of their existence. It is systemic. Thus, violence is conceived of, and used, differently by fascism and anarchy in V4V and it is a matter of nuance in the perception of how it is used and conceived of by the two sides.

This reading is informed by a reading of violence in the history of anarchy which I have addressed before in chapter 8 of my previous book *Black Flag*. I want to revisit this chapter in what follows in this discussion of violence to reacquaint readers with anarchist thinking in regards to the sometimes necessity of violence in the context of an incarcerating society from which one feels the need both to break free and to present the opportunity of a similar freedom to others. The fact is that if one is incarcerated and has no freedom in one's political situation one must either determine to accept it in some way or to refuse it. Since coercive power, and the arbitrary controlling relations it instantiates, are unlikely to just disappear by themselves in an act of surrender, it then falls to self-actualising agents to act for themselves and to strike at that power, subverting, undermining or even destroying it where they can. Given my previous points about how political power is constituted, and its reliance on mass acquiescence, this is not as unforeseeable as one might imagine. One must also remember that violent power is violent power. It is unlikely to be presented with a well meaning argument, see the logic in it, and just give up its violent maintenance of a forced society. In this respect, V4V argues that violence has its strategic uses for anarchy but that were it to become habitual it would itself turn into fascism. One possible way to perceive this is that defensive or liberatory violence is arguably legitimate whilst habitual, systemic and incarcerating violence is not.

Anarchists of the past faced exactly such dilemmas and they had arguments for using violence when they did. I want to return to these, as discussed previously in *Black Flag*, now for a while so that we can be exposed to both the motives and the reasons of actual anarchists (rather than fictional ones like V) in the appreciation of this discussion about violence. Thereafter, I intend to append some additional, and amended, discussion I wrote some years ago about the views of Alexander Berkman, a further anarchist who, early on in his anarchist career, planned, and attempted to carry out, the murder of an oppressive capitalist businessman (the plot involved his then romantic partner, Emma Goldman). Berkman was subdued and captured in the execution of the attempted murder before he could complete it and was sent to prison for 14 years as a result. This, however, gave him much to reflect on in later life when he came to write a book about the fundamentals of anarchism, as we shall see.

European anarchism, in the last third of the nineteenth century, particularly after Bakunin and Marx went their separate ways in 1872, quickly became a very febrile, very volatile, thing. Within several years of that ideological spilt (which was based on the anarchist desire for freedom from states versus the Marxist desire to control them) numerous men, and occasionally women, were planning violent attacks and assaults on all kinds of people from judges and police and government officials to Tsars, bank employees and even people drinking their coffee in regular cafes. Anarchist conferences separately authorised use of “chemical sciences” for the anarchist cause, an oblique reference to explosives. Here I am going to discuss some of the people who took advantage of such services and who regarded violence and even general illegality as a weapon in that cause in order to contextualise the approach of V in V4V. This, however, will not be thought of as “atrocious”. Rather, the atrocity here will be imagined as the conditions described in the reasons such utilisers of violence gave for the violent acts they committed, the social and political

conditions which brought those, whom Emma Goldman thought of as people of deep feeling and heightened sensitivity to cultural conditions, to their compulsion to act violently against those who could only be seen by their attackers as those who needed to be violently stopped and otherwise generally contradicted, their imagined and, in their view, corrupted “law” disregarded.

So here I am talking, at its most general and in a way that includes violence but is not limited to violence, about illegalism, illegalism being something that has a history in the story of anarchism – albeit that some wish it didn’t and others, historically and contemporaneously, try to argue that such people “aren’t really anarchists at all.” The American writer and journalist Paul Z. Simons – who was an illegalist anarchist of many years standing in his various activities around the world, including in Paris, Athens and Rojava – would not have agreed. In “Illegalist Praxis: Notes on a Decade of Crime” he talks about his “time in the worlds of the lawless” (with appropriate regard to any statutes of limitations. It is never very smart as an anarchist of any sort to start recounting in public the things you might be doing that are illegal and any anarchist smart enough to possess a modicum of self-preservation knows very well not to freely volunteer information that snitches, law enforcement agencies or simply disreputable people might take advantage of. In other words, realise that people are always watching, know who to trust and, more importantly, who not to trust, something V seems to take very seriously himself).

Simons states in this brief recitation of his illegalist past that he never knowingly harmed anyone, something to be differentiated from harming property or other material harm. (This is also a personal choice. Others would no doubt, and have, declared some people “legitimate targets” but their justifications must be their own and they must take responsibility for them. There’s no algorithm to set anything in stone here, as V’s own

prescribed voluntarism should make clear.) Simons also claims the majority of his illegality was driven by survival, sometimes desperation, and that he only reflected on their wider “political ramifications” at a later point. Thus, Simons seems to suggest that he was not criminal by conviction but out of necessity. He states between the lines that committing crime by confronting people was not the preferred option. Outsmarting people to subvert the system was much more preferable to him than outright confrontation – with all the latter’s potential for going wrong and ending up in person on person violence as some examples in V4V demonstrate. Burglary, then, is preferable to robbery, acting out of the sight of prying eyes better than stealing in broad daylight with people around. Stealing what you need directly is OK but stealing money of course means that you can exchange it for anything as and when you need it. Simons claims to have stolen as much as \$5,000 in one burglary and as little as \$300 in another. As Simons has it, illegalism is about using your smarts to survive, exploiting the exploitation which is capitalism. (The pirates I habitually refer to as good anarchist examples perhaps felt similarly and, so historians suggest, equally disdained direct confrontation if they could trick or scare people into giving up first. This was part of the reason for flying the big scary Jolly Roger.) He ends his brief recitation (of what turns out to be 1990s crime) with, “In my mind crime functions as a resonance between politics, desperation and fun. And what better way to triangulate insurrection? Many Happy Escapes.”

Yet Simons has also offered a wider view on illegalism in his article from the journal *Modern Slavery* (where he also went by the name El Errante and often contributed articles in the years before his sudden death in 2018) entitled “Illegalism: Why Pay for a Revolution on the Installment Plan...When You Can Steal One?” which is a brief and particular history of illegalism in anarchism. Here Simons begins with the origins of illegalism, Western Europe in the twenty years either side of the beginning of the

twentieth century (i.e. 1880-1920) and particularly in Italy and France, noting that, for the illegalists, "crime became an accepted activity" of some significance for:

"Passage into the illegalist milieu portended a commitment that encompassed the condemnation of all law, all morality, a rejection of both virtue and vice. It established a terrain of activity that by definition was beyond the purview of all social institutions and accepted relationships - the landscape of the illegalist was a place where the insurrection had already been fought and won."

Simons also notes, however, that illegalism – crime – is of particular significance for anarchists because it tickles several anarchist G spots. It is, for example, perhaps the most individualist of activities, both in the doing but also in the desire to do. It needs no permission from others and neither would such illegalists seek it, being self-organisers without any sort of boss or commander. Yet such illegalists were also highly communicative and bonded with others of their milieu since you need to know who to trust (and, more importantly, who not to). Simons also points out that, since illegalism is a matter of putting your neck on the line every time you do it, it demonstrates to the anarchist that freedom, all of anarchism's aims, in fact, are not going to fall from the sky, having been delivered by the stork, but are material matters of physical action carried out by real people. (As Emma Goldman once said, then, direct action of your own, not least of this sort, shows who has a backbone – i.e. who has the courage to take responsibility – and who does not. This is also relevant to the entire depiction of V, already an anarchist when we meet him and a self-determining person of direct action.)

But, at the same time, illegalism is a matter of great controversy within anarchism since anarchists, who I have tried to argue at length myself in the past are naturally ethical

people (anarchism itself being an ethical thing), are bound to have views on its ethicality – or not. There are, in fact, multiple examples throughout history of one kind of anarchist snitching on another kind because something they were doing tweaked their ethical nipples in the wrong way. Illegalism is one such activity which can presage that in more squeamish others. Thus, back in historical context, Simons says that “the Left, which has always asserted a monopoly on morality, was as outraged as the politicians and the press of the dominant society when anarchists started cracking safes and shooting bank tellers.” In a brief but very insightful analysis, Simons argues that the “illegalist versus the rest” anarchist history has been repeated multiple times whether the other side was the syndicalists, anarcho-communists, Bookchinite social anarchists of the 1990s - or to be found in arguments about the various “occupations” of the fledgling 21st century and what actions are thought appropriate or inappropriate at such events (particularly where violence is concerned). There are seemingly always anarchists whose vision of anarchism does not include running around stealing stuff or more furtively relieving various organisations of their inventory or smashing or destroying the possessions of the rich, the government or simply other people who are judged to have taken the wrong side in a cultural and political war. And that’s before we even get to assassinations and personal attacks.

David Graeber, for example, references such differences of opinion at various American “Occupy” protests and other demonstrations in his ethnographic book *Direct Action*. The American trans anarchist, Sofia Johnson, is an actual contemporary example of an illegalist anarchist, currently serving a 90 month sentence in an American correctional facility, who upset some online anarchists because she pointed a gun at a store clerk in a 711 store as part of her illegal means of staying alive – and earned their displeasure and distaste as a result. (It is my understanding via a go-between who is an intimate of

Johnson that she had no intention of shooting anybody. It was simply an imagined threat in order to get things she needed. This apparently did not matter to several online anarchists who berated her for such action anyway.)

Simons, however, intimates that illegalism goes more to the heart of anarchism than some, perhaps even many, anarchists would like to admit. It is, of course, a definitive disjuncture with wider society and, as such, makes things a bit too real for all those people for whom anarchism is supposed to be a nice fluffy (and, unfortunately, largely inconsequential) Utopia to settle down into – something which turns us into good guys without much commitment to anything in particular. As already noted, though, illegalism demonstrates the implicit consequentiality of anarchist praxis, not least in the very fact that it is actions done in the real world which change things. Illegalism acts as a beacon pointing out that, in fact, to act as an anarchist, to act in V's voluntaristic freedom, will necessarily at some point become illegal (for no government, that thing every anarchist is set against as a matter of their very formation and constitution, is going to stand by, unresisting, as you take its power away or redistribute wealth or simply ignore its stipulations) and so illegality is, in fact, a Rubicon every anarchist must ultimately have to face crossing if one is to be genuinely and authentically anarchist. (Once, in fact, I wrote out a list of famous anarchists of past history and pretty much all of them had been officially illegal, at one point or another, due to various direct actions they had voluntarily undertaken – even if that was only publishing something that said “Down with the government!” So it is not niche activity for the anarchist to act against the law but a general prescription or expectation, a requirement or demand, an increasing inevitability.) Perhaps some cannot make that crossing and suddenly their anarchism is revealed as an optimist's dream they don't have the material stomach for. But, either way, illegalism

wakes up the anarchist dreamer to the consequences of the dream. Freedom has its consequences and its price.

An excellent example here, one I shall come back to again later, is the French illegalist, a man who bombed a Paris cafe in 1894 killing one and injuring twenty, Émile Henry. His five page “defence” of his actions before his execution, thankfully preserved for all time in written form in various places, is a concise, emotional and fundamentally logical explanation for a crime many would at least regard as distasteful and some as horrific. Today, of course, Henry would be classed a simple terrorist, the scum of the earth, beyond the pail of “the civilised”. But his reasoning tells another story. Primary here is that Henry does not seek to escape blame for his crime. He admits it and owns it. He says that his attack was not on individuals but on “society”. Yet he refuses the right of others to judge him for “I acknowledge only one tribunal — myself, and the verdict of any other is meaningless to me.” Henry, when he committed the crime, had not been an anarchist for long – barely 3 years – yet in that time he had had his eyes opened – according to his own testimony:

“teachers in the present generation too often forget one thing; it is that life, with its struggles and defeats, its injustices and iniquities, takes upon itself indiscreetly to open the eyes of the ignorant to reality. This happened to me, as it happens to everyone. I had been told that life was easy, that it was wide open to those who were intelligent and energetic; experience showed me that only the cynical and the servile were able to secure good seats at the banquet. I had been told that our social institutions were founded on justice and equality; I observed all around me nothing but lies and impostures.

Each day I shed an illusion. Everywhere I went, I witnessed the same miseries among some, and the same joys among others. I was not slow to understand that the grand words I had been taught to venerate: honour, devotion, duty, were only the mask that concealed the most shameful basenesses.

The manufacturer who created a colossal fortune out of the toil of workers who lacked everything was an honest gentleman. The deputy and the minister, their hands ever open for bribes, were devoted to the public good. The officer who experimented with a new type of rifle on children of seven had done his duty, and, openly in parliament, the president of the council congratulated him! Everything I saw revolted me, and my intelligence was attracted by criticism of the existing social organization. Such criticism has been made too often for me to repeat it. It is enough to say that I became the enemy of a society that I judged to be criminal."

Henry at first became a socialist but soon saw through socialists as people who simply wanted to be at the top of the rotting pile of society instead of those who already were. Then he met some anarchists and these were comrades much more to his taste. Having the stamp of personal authenticity, he was hooked and became an anarchist. Of this, he says:

"I brought with me into the struggle a profound hatred which every day was renewed by the spectacle of this society where everything is base, everything is equivocal, everything is ugly, where everything is an impediment to the outflow of human passions, to the generous impulses of the heart, to the free flight of thought. I wanted to strike as strongly and as justly as I could."

And so he began his bombing career (as V, indeed, does himself). He struck against those he considered exploiters or collaborators (which means, of course, that Henry, like V, developed a philosophy of legitimate targets). He says: "I wanted to show the bourgeoisie that henceforward their pleasures would not be untouched, that their insolent triumphs would be disturbed, that their golden calf would rock violently on its pedestal until the final shock that would cast it down among filth and blood." Henry came to see that "The whole of the bourgeoisie lives by the exploitation of the unfortunate, and should expiate its crimes together." His cafe bomb was his second (the first, discovered by a dog before it could explode, was recovered by police and taken to their station – where it then did explode!) and Henry speaks of it in the following terms:

"The bomb in the Cafe Terminus is the answer to all your violations of freedom, to your arrests, to your searches, to your laws against the Press, to your mass deportations, to your guillotining. But why, you ask, attack those peaceful cafe guests, who sat listening to music and who, no doubt, were neither judges nor deputies nor bureaucrats? Why? It is very simple. The bourgeoisie did not distinguish among the anarchists. Vaillant, [another anarchist bomber] a man on his own, threw a bomb; nine-tenths of the comrades did not even know him. But that meant nothing; the persecution was a mass one, and anyone with the slightest anarchist links was hunted down. And since you hold a whole party responsible for the actions of a single man, and strike indiscriminately, we also strike indiscriminately."

Henry continues with his reasoning of the crime in the following terms:

"Perhaps we should attack only the deputies who make laws against us, the judges who apply those laws, the police who arrest us? I do not agree. These men are only instruments. They do not act in their own name. Their functions were instituted by the bourgeoisie for its

own defence. They are no more guilty than the rest of you. Those good bourgeois who hold no office but who reap their dividends and live idly on the profits of the workers' toil, they also must take their share in the reprisals. And not only they, but all those who are satisfied with the existing order, who applaud the acts of government and so become its accomplices, those clerks earning three or five hundred francs a month who hate the people even more violently than the rich, that stupid and pretentious mass of folk who always choose the strongest side — in other words, the daily clientele of Terminus and the other great cafes!"

Thus, Émile Henry took very seriously the commitments that ordinary men and women had made in simply living their lives and he determined to make people responsible for them even where they, most likely, had never even given it serious thought themselves. Henry believed that people were responsible for their choices, their lives and lifestyle, and the material consequences they had, exactly like V, and imagined to make them personally responsible for it by bringing the attack to them personally. It was a strike of desperation, to be sure, but one in which no one could claim innocence and in which the chains of consequence, which V explained in his TV presentation, are revealed. People, by the ways they either knowingly or not knowing live, create the circumstances for millions of other lives. They are the foundation and bedrock of ANY power by their going along with it. "Should there be no reckoning for this, no responsibility?" thought Henry. Should people just imagine the world becomes as it is by itself, divorced from human actions? Henry, as many such illegalists, clearly thought not. He confronted the people at large with his actions and his words when he states: "At least have the courage of your crimes, gentlemen of the bourgeoisie, and grant that our reprisals are completely legitimate." Henry, just the same as V, believed in making the public responsible.

In this, Henry did not really expect to be understood yet he did what he did and he justified it with this statement that he gave before his execution. I mention it now not because it has some great philosophical lesson to teach us, but because it gives a glimpse into the motives of the illegalist anarchist, persons who have entirely thrown off the very idea of a liberal political "social contract" and who see around them exploiters and their collaborators, the latter a much greater group than the former but one, at least in the judgment of both Émile Henry and the fictional V, who were no less guilty and so no less culpable. It was for this reason that other actual illegalists, ones who fancied themselves brigands or bank robbers, would shoot and kill cops and bank tellers alike to the chagrin of even other anarchists who could not bring themselves to views both so clear-sighted and so disentangled from bourgeois morals as those of their comrades in anarchy.

Thus, as Simons points out, illegalists, such as those the fictional V also becomes, were those who had determined that the insurrection had already come and they were going to actualise it in their very own actions. Of the real life ones Simons says:

"they were not very interested in propaganda by the deed, rather they were convinced that the deed itself, the robbery, the assassination, was the insurrection. The point was not to educate the masses towards the social revolution, but to realize their insurrection here, now and for no one else but the individual, and possibly the union of egoists that she surrounds herself with – the herd, the collaborators – be damned."

But not all illegalists were like this, of course. (V himself does not seem to see the mass as the enemy, for example, as he does those actively working for Norsefire.) In what can tend to be a quite individualistic branch of anarchism, the illegalists would set their own terms of service, as it were. One good actual example Simons talks about here is Marius

Jacob who, together with some others described as “alienated from the world of work”, banded together to form a group they dubbed the “Workers of the Night”. As Simons describes this group, Jacob:

“used the term ‘pacifistic illegalism’ to describe this new twist on anarchist activities. Jacob and his band evolved a simple though powerful set of guidelines, one does not kill except to protect one’s life and freedom from the police, one steals only from social parasites like bankers, bosses, judges, soldiers, the clergy, and not from useful members of society like doctors, artists or architects. Finally, a percentage of the proceeds were to be donated to anarchist causes, depending on the choice and tastes of the illegalist doing the stealing and the giving. Jacob and his gang proved to be cunning and successful burglars.”

This will perhaps seem to my readers somewhat more socially based than the activities of Henry but I would maintain that Marius Jacob and his colleagues were really only doing the same thing as Henry, if with more precise and limited stipulations in regard to targets and purposes.

Jacob, like Henry, however, came to realise that it was a losing game and the forces ranged against the illegalist (“the State”) were likely to catch up to them in the end. But, in committing their various acts, they both saw them as justified as individual anarchist acts of either expropriation (in Jacob’s case) or reprisal (in Henry’s). Simons tells us that in general, and not merely in regard to these two specific examples, “The illegalists... were less interested in social revolution than they were in living in a state of rebellion.” Those who used violence or stealth for the acquisition of funds, “viewed their crimes as a means to an end, as a way to pay the rent and also as bringing the social revolution that much closer to fruition by supporting anarchist causes.” In a similar way today we might argue

that such thought accrues to all the millions of employees who avail themselves of their company's inventory for private gain or the furtherance of political ideas. Simons quotes Max Stirner in this regard (Stirner being a not inconsiderable influence on the illegalists when *The Unique and Its Property* was translated into French) when he says:

"If people reach the point where they lose respect for property (i.e. as a valid idea), then everyone will have property, as all slaves become free people as soon as they no longer respect the master as master."

Émile Pouget's journal *Le Père Peinard* was a further influence at this time (Simons calls it "the most widely read working class anarchist periodical") and it was described contemporaneously as:

"play[ing] upon the appetites, prejudices, and rancours of the proletariat. Without reserve or disguise, it incited theft, counterfeiting, the repudiation of taxes and rents, killing and arson. It counselled the immediate assassination of deputies, senators, judges, priests and army officers. It urged ... farm labourers and vineyard workers to take possession of the farms and vineyards, and to turn the landlords and vineyard owners into fertilizing phosphates ... it recounted the exploits of olden-time brigands and outlaws and exhorted contemporaries to follow their example." (This sounds much like me telling people to become pirates.)

A fine set of examples for economic survival and political existence, I'm sure readers will agree. Yet there is the sense here, as Victor Kibalchich (later Victor Serge) would write as a contributor to the French anarchist publication *L'Anarchie*, that: "The anarchist is always illegal - theoretically. The sole word 'anarchist' means rebellion in every sense."

I shall skip over Simons' recitation of the various activities of the perhaps most famous of all the illegalists in France – the Bonnot Gang – to concentrate on the more economic and systemic, human relational, points here. Being an illegalist does not necessarily mean blowing up random cafe goers or holding up the bank with some pantyhose or a balaclava over your face and a pistol in your hand. In fact, if you are smart (and clearly not all the illegalists were or are) you should be trying to get away with your ill-gotten gains with as little human interaction as possible. (Compare how V operates.) Shoplifting is a very common form of illegalism practised worldwide and, if its for essentials like food or clothing, can even elicit a measure of general public sympathy. Squatting or pirating things – from electricity to the Internet – are also obviously illegal yet can be practised without interference for some length of time without discovery if you have the guts to try and the ingenuity to pull it off. The point is that acting against the law is one means of economic survival in a world that demands payment and preaches its own possession of every resource. It may not be a complete solution (and it surely attracts attention sooner or later as the constant police raids on places like squats in Berlin demonstrate) but it is another tool in the arsenal of the anarchist, a means of survival that requires some measure of bravery (which is self-actualisation and self-responsibility) and makes your anarchist existence both real and of consequence. But it also has something to say, as an economic strategy, about organisation as well – as Simons points out towards the end of his article. Here we note:

"the turning on its very head of the question of organization, which usually begins with the question, 'what type of structure shall we create?' The illegalists, however, in the example provided by their activity began with the question what shall we do, what activity is required for the successful realization of this project? Then based upon what it is that a group is seeking to accomplish, the structure required to realize the activity comes into

being. Each of these solutions then is also tempered by the principle of its ability to realize the needs and desires of the individual, to safeguard her autonomy against the ever present likelihood that organizations will tend to blunt and ultimately deny the sovereignty of individuals in favour of the growing power of the collective, especially with the passage of time."

Illegalism, then, is an example of a type of anarchism which is not focused on the creation of an organisation – and keeping it intact at all costs – but on activity-focused organisation in the lives of self-organising and self-motivating people who might come together to achieve something – like a theft or a burglary – but then immediately dissolve upon completion of that task, the people who came together to achieve it then at arm's length from each other, nodes on a network, perhaps, but never people joined at the hip, an organisation that can be undermined simply by getting at the organisational body in some way. Here we might consider that, historically, anarchist organisation had a verifiably huge problem with infiltration and the reality of police moles or snitches in an anarchist organisation was (and remains) a real threat.

Consequently, such ad hoc "organisation by activity" was regarded as inherently safer by the illegalists and limited the interaction between active anarchists to certain activities rather than making people inseparable or tied to an organisation which could be completely blown apart if it was infiltrated (as several were, historically speaking). The Invisible Committee, a French insurrectionist collective in the recent past, were repetitive to the point of paranoia and consequently obsessive about the dangers of the organisation that only exists to further itself and, in illegalism, this was revealed as both a genuine concern and an operational weakness in historical context. The "discipline of indiscipline" – as Buenaventura Durruti called it – can then have its advantages and not

the least of these is the minimisation of the organisational fetters of administration and oversight. The illegalists, then, focused on a voluntary self-obligation to TASKS as a means of economic organisation and survival on the basis of their self-organising and self-determining anarchist principles and we should take this under advisement. In this regard it is interesting that Alan Moore and David Lloyd chose to tell a story about a singular individual and his attempt to ignite a wider flame of anarchy in others rather than about a revolutionary group who attempt to “take charge”. In my, illegalist and insurrectionary, understanding of anarchy, this is exactly the appropriate choice.

But not all anarchists saw it exactly this way. Some of them saw illegality, in this case violent illegality, as going beyond this and as explicit propaganda, retributive propaganda, propaganda of, or by, the deed, for crimes they imagined committed against them or, if not them precisely, then people like them in the population generally. (V seems to be imagined as one of these.) Consequently, I want to focus, for the remainder of this diversion into a discussion of real anarchist examples, especially on four linked people who were like this, one of whom we have already met. These are François Claudius Koenigstein, otherwise known as Ravachol, Auguste Vaillant, the already introduced Émile Henry, and Sante Caserio. They are linked in that, historically, they seem to have inspired each other to successive acts of violence in 1890s France - and each of them was guillotined by the French state as a result. This, then, is a story about anarchism in France in the early 1890s at a time, across an ocean, when Berkman and Goldman were planning their own violence and after the violence of the Haymarket event in the preceding decade when anarchists in Chicago were falsely accused of planning and executing violence and condemned to death as a result. It is a story of French revolution a century after the Revolution of 1789 and about twenty years after the Paris Commune which had demonstrated that freedom and violence are often mutually implicated.

By common consent, in fact, the repression of the French state during the so-called “Bloody Week” of May 21-28, 1871, when perhaps up to 20,000 Communards were put to death, “hung over French anarchists throughout the following decades” – as John Merriman puts it in his essay “The Spectre of the Commune and French Anarchism in the 1890s” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*. He argues that, “The Commune remained a constant source of inspiration and at the same time offered a practical guide for action for the anarchist movement.” But, of course, the Commune was a matter of the directest of direct action and visceral violence – essentially freedom or death. It raises the question not only of how far someone would go for their freedom but how far a state would go to retain control over it. When we discuss violence, we should never imagine it is a one-sided issue (as Moore does not in V4V, in fact).

Merriman writes in his essay that, “Anarchists insisted on the importance of a revolution by ordinary people, one that would be spontaneous. They had no confidence in any kind of Marxist organisation that privileged the role of a revolutionary elite as leaders of such a movement.” (Compare the modern, and not anarchist, phenomenon of “focoist” terrorism, apparently invented as a tactic by Che Guevara, where a terrorist or terrorists consider their actions the vanguard of a more populist revolution they are inspiring. I thank academic of terrorism, Professor Katherine E. Brown, for this reference.) In this respect, in fact, the Commune could be criticised. It was not simply an anarchist endeavour anyway and included a ragtag band of what would today be called “leftists” of various descriptions. But it had leaders and it wanted territory and, to this extent, it was probably always bound to fail. To this extent, in fact, Jean Grave’s words, reported by Merriman, that the Communards had relied on leaders too much and not on their natural mass instinct to rise up enough, make perfect sense. The connection of the Commune to the four men I want to highlight in the rest of this chapter is not merely cultural, in fact.

One of my four, the aforementioned Émile Henry, was the son of the important Communard, Fortuné Henry, a man involved in signing an order which licenced the taking of "bourgeois" hostages by the Communards. He managed to escape the Commune's demise disguised as a painter and was condemned to death for 'insurrection' in absentia. His son, Émile, was born to a life of political militancy and would not see 25 years of age due to his own developing beef with the bourgeoisie.

Merriman consequently sets the scene for our four men like this:

"In the late 1870s and at the beginning of the 1880s, anarchist groups began to form in Paris. In 1893, the police counted 2400 anarchists in France, of whom 852 were considered dangerous. Many of these anarchists were ordinary workers, such as metallurgical workers, masons, and printers. In Paris, these groups tended to be found in specific quartiers, and were influenced by the anarchist idea that the revolution would ultimately emerge from neighbourhood insurrections. They set up shop street by street. Here, again, the influence of the Commune can be clearly seen..."

Confronted with the power and commitment to repression of the state, in the wake of the Commune, anarchists debated strategies of resistance and of revolution. In about 1876, Peter Kropotkin, Paul Brousse (a former Communard living in exile in Geneva), and Errico Malatesta began to speak of 'propaganda of the deed'. Brousse began to organise militant anarchists 'under the beloved flag of the Commune'. In order to bring about revolution, acts or 'deeds' were required. The anarchist congress held in London in 1881 officially adopted the strategy of 'propaganda by the deed'. Given the fact that European states had become increasingly centralised, there seemed no other choice. Moreover, the savage repression during and after the Commune had clearly demonstrated the power of the state, protector

of capitalism, to which it was so closely tied. The result was the continued poverty of ordinary people. States were fully capable of and prepared to perpetuate further massacres." (Compare the context Moore paints in V4V.)

It is here we can begin to talk about our four men. I begin with the first, Ravachol. Ravachol, born François Koenigstein to a Dutch father and French mother, was born in October 1859 north-east of Saint-Étienne in central France. His family were poor and Ravachol never had any money throughout his short life. He took the name Ravachol, his mother's surname, after his father abandoned the family when he was only 8 years old. Ravachol had to work to help support his mother, a brother and a sister, and also a nephew. He scratched around for work, doing jobs he would lose again, and even played accordion at society balls in Saint-Étienne for money. Ravachol also robbed graves before he became politically active. When he did, he joined in with anarchists and also groups protesting to improve general working conditions, events that were common to many developed countries at that time. Ever since the Paris Commune police had come down hard on such people and one of these occasions would become known as "the Clichy Affair".

This event refers to a trial that took place after three anarchists taking part in the first French celebration of International Workers' Day on May 1st, 1891, got caught up in the consequences of the police commissioner's order that the demonstrators' red flag be confiscated. This led to shots being fired from both sides and some people being injured. But what makes this event stand out is that three anarchists were arrested and, when back at the police station, they were summarily and violently beaten – which understandably outraged their anarchist colleagues. At the subsequent trial, the prosecutors and the court both accepted that the violence against the anarchists had

taken place but they were found guilty anyway. The anarchists saw this as provocation and Ravachol was one of those who saw it this way too. He determined to strike back.

It is speculated that Ravachol, who had fled to Spain in mid 1891 over the murder of “an elderly recluse”, learned to make bombs whilst there, perhaps in Barcelona. He returned to France and went to Paris in August 1891, using a fake name, where he met up with local anarchists. Whilst meeting with them he happened to meet the wife of one of those who had been arrested and beaten. Ravachol was then aroused to take action in 1892 against members of the judiciary who had taken part in the case because of the trial outcomes for the anarchist participants in the previous events. After stealing “dynamite from a quarry,” Ravachol then placed bombs in the living quarters of the Advocate General, Léon Bulot (executive of the Public Ministry), and Edmond Benoît, the councillor who had presided over the Assizes Court during the Clichy Affair on two dates in March 1892. An informant reported on Ravachol to the police, however, because he had been too free with his words and he was quickly arrested after the second bomb. Before Ravachol’s own trial, further anarchists then bombed the restaurant where this informant had worked. Ravachol was convicted at his trial and condemned to life imprisonment but at a further trial later for further crimes (three separate murders - although he only admitted to the one concerning the elderly person and gave his reason for that as his abject poverty) he was condemned to death. He was publicly guillotined on 11th July 1892 (a few days before Berkman would attack the businessman, Frick, across the Atlantic, in fact).

What was going on in the mind of Ravachol during these proceedings? We shall probably never know in any great detail. But there are some literary fragments that give an insight into the mind and motivation of the man who, to some others, became both a hero and

an inspiration. The first of the two documents I want to quote here in full was dictated to police by Ravachol after his initial imprisonment for the bombings. Not immediately made public, it was only subsequently found by a French historian in the Paris Police Archives in 1964 and is titled "My Principles":

"The above named, after having eaten his fill, spoke to us as follows:

'Messieurs, it is my habit, wherever I am, to do propaganda work. Do you know what anarchism is?' We answered 'No' to this question. 'This doesn't surprise me,' he responded. 'The working class which, like you, is forced to work to earn its bread, doesn't have the time to devote to the reading of pamphlets they're given. It's the same for you. Anarchy is the obliteration of property. There currently exist many useless things; many occupations are useless as well, for example, accounting. With anarchy there is no more need for money, no further need for bookkeeping and the other forms of employment that derive from this. There are currently too many citizens who suffer while others swim in opulence, in abundance. This situation cannot last; we all should profit by the surplus of the rich; but even more obtain, like them, all that is necessary. In current society, it isn't possible to arrive at this goal. Nothing, not even a tax on income, could change the face of things.

Nevertheless, the bulk of workers think that if we acted in this way, things would improve. It is an error to think this way. If we tax the landlord, he'll increase his rents and in this way will arrange for those who suffer to pay the new charges imposed on them. In any event, no law can touch landlords for, being the masters of their goods, we can't prevent them from doing whatever they want with them. What, then, should be done? Wipe out property and, by doing this, wipe out those who take all. If this abolition takes place, we have to also do away with money, in order to prevent any idea of accumulation, which would force a return

to the current regime. It is in effect money that is the cause of all discord, all hatred, of all ambitions; it is, in a word, the creator of property. This metal, in truth, has nothing but an agreed upon price, born of its rarity. If we were no longer obliged to give something in exchange for those things we need to live, gold would lose its value and no one would seek it. Nor could they enrich themselves, because nothing they would amass could serve them in obtaining a better life than that of others. There would then no longer be any need of laws, no need of masters. As for religions, they'd be destroyed, because their moral influence would no longer have any reason for existence. There would no longer be the absurdity of believing in a God who doesn't exist, since after death everything is finished.

So we should hold fast to life, but when I say life I mean life, which does not mean slaving all day to make the bosses fat and, while dying oneself of hunger, become the authors of their well-being. Masters aren't necessary, these people whose idleness is maintained by our labour; everyone must make himself useful to society, by which I mean work according to his ability and his aptitude. In this way, one would be a baker, another a teacher, etc. Following this principle, work would diminish, and each of us would have only an hour or two of work a day. Man, not being able to remain without some form of occupation, would find his distraction in work; there would be no lazy idlers, and if they did exist, there'd be so few of them that we could leave them in peace and, without complaint, let them profit from the work of others. There being no more laws, marriage would be destroyed. We would unite by inclination, and the family would be founded on the love of a father and mother for their children. For example, if a woman no longer loved he who she had chosen as a companion, she could separate from him and form a new association. In a word, complete freedom to live with those we love. If in the case I just cited there were children, society would raise them, that is to say, those who will love the children will take them in charge. With this free union, there will be no more prostitution. Secret illnesses would no longer

exist, since these are only born of the abuse of the coming together of the sexes; an abuse to which women are forced to submit, since society's current conditions oblige them to take this up as a job in order to survive. Isn't money necessary in order to live, earned at whatever cost? With my principles, which I can't in so little time lay out in full detail, the army will no longer have any reason to exist, since there will no longer be distinct nations; private property would be destroyed, and all nations would have joined into one, which would be the Universe. No more war, no more disputes, no more jealousy, no more theft, no more murder, no more court system, no more police, no more administration.

The anarchists have not yet gone into the details of their constitution: the mileposts alone have been laid out. Today the anarchists are numerous enough to overthrow the current state of things, and if that hasn't yet happened, it's because we must complete the education of the followers, give birth in them to the energy and the firm will to assist in the realization of their projects. All that is needed for that is a shove, that someone put themselves at their head, and the revolution will take place. He who blows up houses has as a goal the extermination of all those who, by their social standing or their acts, are harmful to anarchy. If it was permitted to openly attack these people without fearing for the police, and so for one's skin, we wouldn't set out to destroy their homes through explosive devices, which could kill the suffering classes they have at their service at the same time as them."

I don't know what you, my reader, were expecting to read there from a grave-robbing, murdering, bomb-planter but I wonder if it was something as sane, intelligent and reasonable as that? Far from being an unhinged animal, Ravachol comes across as a man of thought and depth who seeks societal answers to societal problems and who would prefer a social compact that avoided a necessary war of all against all for simple survival.

This continues, in fact, in the second document of his I want to quote, the defence speech he intended to give at his second trial for the three imagined murders - not as a denial of guilt but as an acceptance and explanation, from his perspective, of events. At the actual trial, after a few words had escaped his mouth, he was denied further right to speak and, shortly after, put to death. But that speech was preserved and I share it with you now:

"If I speak, it's not to defend myself for the acts of which I'm accused, for it is society alone which is responsible, since by its organization it sets man in a continual struggle of one against the other. In fact, don't we today see, in all classes and all positions, people who desire, I won't say the death, because that doesn't sound good, but the ill-fortune of their like, if they can gain advantages from this? For example, doesn't a boss hope to see a competitor die? And don't all businessmen reciprocally hope to be the only ones to enjoy the advantages that their occupations bring? In order to obtain employment, doesn't the unemployed worker hope that for some reason or another someone who does have a job will be thrown out of his workplace. Well then, in a society where such events occur, there's no reason to be surprised about the kind of acts for which I'm blamed, which are nothing but the logical consequence of the struggle for existence that men carry on who are obliged to use every means available in order to live. And since it's every man for himself, isn't he who is in need reduced to thinking: 'Well, since that's the way things are, when I'm hungry I have no reason to hesitate about using the means at my disposal, even at the risk of causing victims! Bosses, when they fire workers, do they worry whether or not they're going to die of hunger? Do those who have a surplus worry if there are those who lack the basic necessities?'

There are some who give assistance, but they are powerless to relieve all those in need and who will either die prematurely because of privations of various kinds, or voluntarily by

suicides of all kinds, in order to put an end to a miserable existence and to not have to put up with the rigours of hunger, with countless shames and humiliations, and who are without hope of ever seeing them end. Thus, there are the Hayem and Souhain families, who killed their children so as not to see them suffer any longer, and all the women who, in fear of not being able to feed a child, don't hesitate to destroy in their wombs the fruit of their love.

And all these things happen in the midst of an abundance of all sorts of products. We could understand if these things happened in a country where products are rare, where there is famine. But in France, where abundance reigns, where butcher shops are loaded with meat, bakeries with bread, where clothing and shoes are piled up in stores, where there are unoccupied lodgings! How can anyone accept that everything is for the best in a society when the contrary can be seen so clearly? There are many people who will feel sorry for the victims, but who'll tell you they can't do anything about it. Let everyone scrape by as he can! What can he who lacks the necessities when he's working do when he loses his job? He has only to let himself die of hunger. Then they'll throw a few pious words on his corpse. This is what I wanted to leave to others. I preferred to make of myself a trafficker in contraband, a counterfeiter, a murderer and assassin. I could have begged, but it's degrading and cowardly and even punished by your laws, which make poverty a crime. If all those in need, instead of waiting, took, wherever and by whatever means, the self-satisfied would understand perhaps a bit more quickly that it's dangerous to want to consecrate the existing social state, where worry is permanent and life threatened at every moment.

We will quickly understand that the anarchists are right when they say that, in order to have moral and physical peace, the causes that give birth to crime and criminals must be destroyed. We won't achieve these goals in suppressing he who, rather than die a slow

death caused by the privations he had and will have to put up with, without any hope of ever seeing them end, prefers, if he has the least bit of energy, to violently take that which can assure his well-being, even at the risk of death, which would only put an end to his sufferings.

So that is why I committed the acts of which I am accused, and which are nothing but the logical consequence of the barbaric state of a society which does nothing but increase the rigour of the laws that go after the effects without ever touching the causes. It is said that you must be cruel to kill your like, but those who say this don't see that you resolve to do this only to avoid the same fate.

In the same way you, messieurs members of the jury, will doubtless sentence me to death, because you think it is necessary, and that my death will be a source of satisfaction for you who hate to see human blood flow; but when you think it is useful to have it flow in order to ensure the security of your existence, you hesitate no more than I do, but with this difference: you do it without running any risk, while I, on the other hand, acted at the risk of my very life. Well, messieurs, there are no more criminals to judge, but the causes of crime to destroy! In creating the articles of the Criminal Code, the legislators forgot that they didn't attack the causes, but only the effects, and so they don't in any way destroy crime. In truth, the causes continuing to exist, the effects will necessarily flow from them. There will always be criminals, for today you destroy one, but tomorrow ten will be born.

What, then, is needed? Destroy poverty, this seed of crime, in assuring to all the satisfaction of their needs! How difficult this is to realize! All that is needed is to establish society on a new basis where all will be held in common and where each, producing according to his abilities and his strength, could consume according to his needs. Then and only then will we

no longer see people like the hermit of Notre-Dame-de-Grace, and others, begging for a metal whose victims and slaves they become! We will no longer see women give up their charms, like a common piece of merchandise, in exchange for this same metal that often prevents us from recognizing whether or not affection is sincere. We will no longer see men like Pranzini, Prado, Berland, Anastay and others who kill in order to have this same metal. This shows that the cause of all crimes is always the same - and you have to be foolish not to see this. Yes, I repeat it: it is society that makes criminals and you, jury members, instead of striking, you should use your intelligence and your strength to transform society. In one fell swoop you'll suppress all crime. And your work, in attacking causes, will be greater and more fruitful than your justice, which belittles itself in punishing its effects.

I am nothing but an uneducated worker; but because I have lived the life of the poor, I feel more than a rich bourgeois the iniquity of your repressive laws. What gives you the right to kill or lock up a man who, put on earth with the need to live, found himself obliged to take that which he lacks in order to feed himself?

I worked to live and to provide for my family; as long as neither I nor my family suffered too much, I remained what you call honest. Then work became scarce, and with unemployment came hunger. It is only then that the great law of nature, that imperious voice that accepts no reply, the instinct of preservation, forced me to commit some of the crimes and misdemeanours of which I am accused and which I admit I am the author of. Judge me, messieurs of the jury, but if you have understood me, while judging me judge all the unfortunate who poverty, combined with natural pride, made criminals, and who wealth or ease would have made honest men. An intelligent society would have made of them men like any other!"

I do not really have much to add to this. Ravachol's sincere words, uttered in prelude to his unjust demise at the hands of cowards who, as he says, concerned themselves with effects rather than causes, say more than I ever could.

And so instead I move along to Auguste Vaillant, a man who, in many ways, has a similar background to Ravachol. He too was poor, moved from place to place to seek work (including, in one period of his life, even travelling to Argentina) and spent time in prison for stealing food. During his life in and around Paris he, like Ravachol, fell in with anarchists. He was made famous, however, for throwing a bomb in the French Chamber of Deputies on December 9th, 1893. The bomb was very underpowered and caused minor injuries to several Deputies but no serious injuries or deaths and may be regarded as more a symbolic gesture than a serious attempt to kill. He was motivated both by his own plight, and that of his many comrades, but also by the unjust execution, as he saw it, of Ravachol. His action had large political effects in France for, as a result, the French government announced a series of laws known colloquially as "lois scélérates" ("villainous laws") which, respectively, condemned advocacy of any crime as being itself a crime, which permitted the state to repress most of the anarchist press, condemned any person directly or indirectly involved in a propaganda of the deed act, even if no killing was carried out, and condemned any person or newspaper using anarchist propaganda (essentially a sanction on freedom of the press and an attempt to ban any public anarchist sentiment). Vaillant himself was arrested almost immediately after his action (which actually slightly injured him too and required hospital treatment) and he was condemned to death by guillotine as Ravachol had been. He was put to death on 5th February, 1894.

I have two documents to share in regard to Vaillant and his motivations as I did with Ravachol. The first is presented as an account of his "interrogation" by French authorities

whilst in his hospital bed and was originally published in the French newspaper, *Le Matin*. How authentic an account it is is naturally a matter of conjecture when the source is a newspaper but it is presented as is and left to the reader to decide its meaning and worth:

"It was exactly 9:00 a.m. when messieurs Lepine, police prefect, Roulier, procureur of the Republic, Clément, judicial commissioner; Meyer, investigating magistrate; and Fedée, police officer, went to the Hôtel-Dieu Hospital for the interrogation of Vaillant, alias Marchal. The wounded man was lying on his bed, his cut face bearing a cloth band compressing the light wound on his nose. He didn't appear in the least perturbed by the magistrates' entrance into the small room where he was being held. He raised himself slightly on his elbow and stretched his neck in a movement of expectation and cheeky curiosity. The investigating magistrate Meyer having asked him if his condition allowed him to bear a long interrogation, Vaillant dryly responded: 'Perfectly.' His face then lit up with a strange, mocking, almost demonic smile.

'Until now,' M. Meyer said to him, 'you've had a strange attitude that seems to confirm the suspicions against you. The information gathered about you presents you as a man particularly devoted to anarchism.' 'Indeed I am an anarchist and I am proud of it.' 'What did you go to do at the Chamber yesterday?' 'I went there to do what pleased me. There were many others besides me.' 'Why these two names, Marchal and Vaillant, which you gave in different places?' 'Because it pleased me to act that way. I have no explanations to give you.' 'But you had a goal in seeking to hide your identity.' 'A goal? Not at all. My name is Vaillant in Choisy-le-Roi and Marchal in Paris. There are tons of people who have pseudonyms. What does that prove?' 'It proved you are a suspect.'

Vaillant interrupted the judge with a loud laugh. 'So I'm a suspect,' he shouted with his loud, metallic voice. 'Suspected of what? Of having thrown the bomb in the Chamber of Deputies? That's why you've come here to interrogate me, why you're nosing around trying to get answers out of me. There's no need to work so hard at this.' And Vaillant added, shaking his head with an air of satisfaction and defiance: 'Well, I'm the one who did it. It's unfortunate that it's some sad buggers who are taking the rap. I'd have loved to make a fricassee of those deputy bastards.' 'What had the deputies ever done to you?' 'What did they do to me? To me personally, nothing. But they're people it wouldn't be such a bad thing to be rid of.' 'And you committed this odious act without thinking that you have a wife and children?' 'Oh my wife and children won't be any worse off when they don't have me than when they do.'

Vaillant then complacently provided the information that was asked of him about his past. He was born in Mezières December 29, 1861 and he worked at various professions. His last position was at the leather craft store of M. Petitpoint in Choisy-le-Roi. The idea to throw the bomb at the chamber came to Vaillant after the rejection of the proposed amnesty bill. Well before this the anarchist had developed a plan to commit an attack in Paris 'to frighten the bourgeois,' but this plan was still quite vague and he didn't know who he'd attack. Auguste Vaillant left his home in Choisy-le-Roi on November 26, leaving in distress the mistress Marchal and a little girl named Sidonie, who he'd had with his legitimate spouse, currently in America. He went to Paris and moved in to 70 rue Daguerre in a hotel owned by Mme Picard. He arrived at this establishment, one of a low order, on November 27, his baggage consisting of only a valise in bad condition and a blackened wooden box with crude hinges and a primitive lock. For the sum of twenty-four francs per month, he rented room two, on the second floor on the street side.

The existence Vaillant led in this tiny room was extremely mysterious: he never received any guests but he often went out at night, often not returning. Nevertheless, he enjoyed a certain amount of consideration in the hotel, where he was registered under the name Marchal. As proof of identity he had provided the owner a marriage license in this name, which we know to be that of his mistress. The latter must have been or must be married. He inspired confidence by paying a month in advance. But he never went out without taking his valise and only wanted his room done in his presence. On the eve of the attack, that is Friday, Vaillant returned home at noon, laid down and then went out again at about 6:00. He asked Mme Picard for the address of a locksmith to repair his cloth bag, one of whose hinges he said was broken. The hotel keeper gave him the address of a locksmith on the rue Gassendi, who wasn't in when the anarchist went there. After that no one saw Vaillant; he refused to say where he spent the night of Friday into Saturday in order 'not to compromise a comrade.' The accused gave all this information with good grace, all the while smiling, mockingly affirming its scrupulous accuracy.

Nor did he hesitate to give a complete description of the murderous device that he made with his own hands. The examination of the metal debris found in the Chamber had led people to believe that the explosive was contained in a soldier's can or in a mess tin. It is Vaillant himself who said he used a worker's canteen, that is, a tin recipient fifteen centimetres high and oval in form. This utensil usually has a cap and a handle used for carrying it. In order for the bomb to take up as little room as possible in his pocket Vaillant removed the handle, one of the fasteners, as well as the cap. He obtained this object and one like it at the Bazaar of the Hotel de Ville. The explosive used in the improvised bomb was made of chlorate powder and the projectiles, as we already know, were simple cobbler's nails. In the middle Vaillant had placed a glass ampoule filled with sulphuric acid whose extremity was formed by a cotton tampon. The device was of the type known as a

reversal device. Once the canteen was turned upside down the acid ate away at the tampon and the contact of the acid with the powder charge caused the latter to be set alight. It is believed that Vaillant used 750 grams of nails. The anarchist admits that he himself manipulated the substances that made up the chlorate powder but he refuses to say how he obtained these products. Nor did he want to divulge the address of the nail merchant.

'How did you enter the Chamber,' they then asked the anarchist. 'Easily. With a card given me by M. Argeliès, deputy from the Seine et Oise.' 'And how did you throw your bomb?' 'I was seated in the second row of the spectators, against the barrier of the tribune reserved for members of the public with tickets. I had my bomb in the right hand pocket of my overcoat and I held myself perfectly still in order to avoid a shock that would have produced a premature explosion. I waited an hour for the favourable moment to throw my box and took advantage of the moment when the deputies' attention was concentrated on the tribune, where M. Mirman had just spoken. My intention was to throw my device so that it fell in the hemicycle at the foot of the tribune. But a lady sitting next to me prevented me from fully extending my arm and I wasn't able to throw the bomb as vigorously as I would have liked. The bomb exploded in the air and I was one of the first victims of the explosion.' 'What did you do afterwards?' 'I sought to flee. I went downstairs, wiping the blood dripping from my nose with a handkerchief and I found the doors closed, which didn't surprise me at all, since I'd heard the order given by M. Bizarelli. 'And afterwards?' 'Afterwards I went back up, crossing the rotunda. I walked through the corridors of the tribunes and then went to the urinals. Someone said to me, 'You're wounded, go get yourself taken care of at the infirmary.' After my head was wrapped in a bandage the police grabbed me and took me to a superintendent. You know the rest.' He was asked if he regretted his act and Vaillant responded: 'I regret nothing at all, and if I was free I'd do it all over again. The people have been suffering for long enough. All methods are good to hasten their deliverance.' And

Vaillant added with a tone of profound conviction: 'I'm proud of the act I committed. If you think I had accomplices you're wrong. I did all this on my own, and if my spontaneous confession gives me the right to a favour I ask you to bother no one because of me.'"

The second document I have to share in regard to Auguste Vaillant is his own courtroom statement which, in his case, was allowed to be heard before he was put to death. It reads as follows:

"Gentlemen, in a few minutes you are to deal your blow, but in receiving your verdict I shall have at least the satisfaction of having wounded the existing society, that cursed society in which one may see a single man spending, uselessly, enough to feed thousands of families; an infamous society which permits a few individuals to monopolize all the social wealth, while there are hundreds of thousands of unfortunates who have not even the bread that is not refused to dogs, and while entire families are committing suicide for want of the necessities of life. Ah, gentlemen, if the governing classes could go down among the unfortunates! But no, they prefer to remain deaf to their appeals. It seems that a fatality impels them, like the royalty of the eighteenth century, toward the precipice which will engulf them, for woe be to those who remain deaf to the cries of the starving, woe to those who, believing themselves of superior essence, assume the right to exploit those beneath them! There comes a time when the people no longer reason; they rise like a hurricane, and pass away like a torrent. Then we see bleeding heads impaled on pikes.

Among the exploited, gentlemen, there are two classes of individuals. Those of one class, not realizing what they are and what they might be, take life as it comes, believe that they are born to be slaves, and content themselves with the little that is given them in exchange for their labour. But there are others, on the contrary, who think, who study, and who,

looking about them, discover social iniquities. Is it their fault if they see clearly and suffer at seeing others suffer? Then they throw themselves into the struggle, and make themselves the bearers of the popular claims. Gentlemen, I am one of these last. Wherever I have gone, I have seen unfortunates bent beneath the yoke of capital. Everywhere I have seen the same wounds causing tears of blood to flow, even in the remoter parts of the inhabited districts of South America, where I had the right to believe that he who was weary of the pains of civilization might rest in the shade of the palm trees and there study nature. Well, there even, more than elsewhere, I have seen capital come, like a vampire, to suck the last drop of blood of the unfortunate pariahs.

Then I came back to France, where it was reserved for me to see my family suffer atrociously. This was the last drop in the cup of my sorrow. Tired of leading this life of suffering and cowardice, I carried this bomb to those who are primarily responsible for social misery. I am reproached with the wounds of those who were hit by my projectiles. Permit me to point out in passing that, if the bourgeois had not massacred or caused massacres during the Revolution, it is probable that they would still be under the yoke of the nobility. On the other hand, figure up the dead and wounded on Tonquin, Madagascar, Dahomey, adding thereto the thousands, yes, millions of unfortunates who die in the factories, the mines, and wherever the grinding power of capital is felt. Add also those who die of hunger, and all this with the assent of our Deputies. Beside all this, of how little weight are the reproaches now brought against me! It is true that one does not efface the other; but, after all, are we not acting on the defensive when we respond to the blows which we receive from above? I know very well that I shall be told that I ought to have confined myself to speech for the vindication of the people's claims. But what can you expect! It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear.

Too long have they answered our voices by imprisonment, the rope, rifle volleys. Make no mistake; the explosion of my bomb is not only the cry of the rebel Vaillant, but the cry of an entire class which vindicates its rights, and which will soon add acts to words. For, be sure of it, in vain will they pass laws. The ideas of the thinkers will not halt; just as, in the last century, all the governmental forces could not prevent the Diderots and the Voltaires from spreading emancipating ideas among the people, so all the existing governmental forces will not prevent the Reclus, the Darwins, the Spencers, the Ibsens, the Mirbeaus, from spreading the ideas of justice and liberty which will annihilate the prejudices that hold the mass in ignorance. And these ideas, welcomed by the unfortunate, will flower in acts of revolt as they have done in me, until the day when the disappearance of authority shall permit all men to organize freely according to their choice, when everyone shall be able to enjoy the product of his labour, and when those moral maladies called prejudices shall vanish, permitting human beings to live in harmony, having no other desire than to study the sciences and love their fellows.

I conclude, gentlemen, by saying that a society in which one sees such social inequalities as we see all about us, in which we see every day suicides caused by poverty, prostitution flaring at every street corner, — a society whose principal monuments are barracks and prisons, — such a society must be transformed as soon as possible, on pain of being eliminated, and that speedily, from the human race. Hail to him who labours, by no matter what means, for this transformation! It is this idea that has guided me in my duel with authority, but as in this duel I have only wounded my adversary, it is now its turn to strike me. Now, gentlemen, to me it matters little what penalty you may inflict, for, looking at this assembly with the eyes of reason, I cannot help smiling to see you, atoms lost in matter, and reasoning only because you possess a prolongation of the spinal marrow, assume the right to judge one of your fellows. Ah! gentlemen, how little a thing is your assembly and your

verdict in the history of humanity; and human history, in its turn, is likewise a very little thing in the whirlwind which bears it through immensity, and which is destined to disappear, or at least to be transformed, in order to begin again the same history and the same facts, a veritably perpetual play of cosmic forces renewing and transferring themselves forever."

I am sure that, considering the speeches of Ravachol and Vaillant together, you can see a theme developing, a theme not so utterly different from that occasionally espoused by V in V4V, albeit it that he biases this towards advocating for anarchy pure and simple. This theme continues on in the speech of my next character, Émile Henry, on whom I have already reported in my discussion of illegalism, above, in which I reproduced his courtroom address. Henry, as we have already learned, was the son of a Communard and was only 21 years old when he committed his propaganda of the deed on 12th February, 1894, a week after Vaillant's death and in response to it. His first years were spent in exile in Spain until the 1880 French amnesty freed all Communards to return to France. On his return, his brother, who was already an anarchist, introduced him to anarchists as well. Yet Henry did not himself become an anarchist until the early 1890s, then in his late teens. He was an intelligent youth and had passed the written entrance exam for the prestigious École Polytechnique and he was not the sort of person who simply went along with others, being independent of mind. At first, for example, he had opposed the violent bombings of Ravachol that had potential to harm "innocent" people as well as their stated targets. Brutal police repression of anarchists as a result of such actions, however, changed his mind. What particularly outraged him and became the final straw was the way Vaillant had been treated.

Henry was not like Ravachol and Vaillant in one respect, however. Rather than blaming specific official figures – judges, Deputies – for societal problems, Henry blamed everyone who went along with them, in class terms, the bourgeoisie. It is for this reason that historian John Merriman has suggested that when Henry bombed the Café Terminus in Paris on February 12th, 1894, he was committing one of the first acts of violence against “ordinary people” that anarchists had ever engaged in. (A bomb throwing at a Barcelona opera house had taken place in 1893 so Henry’s action is not an absolute first.) As I reported when discussing Henry earlier, he had consequently come to the conclusion that there are NO innocent bourgeoisie and that, therefore, he did not see why the oppressions and exploitations they supported by their indifference to them and their participation in helping to carry them out should go without consequences. Henry had carried out one previous attack before this, of course, as I suggested above, in November 1892 when his time bomb was found and killed five police officers who removed it. On his arrest for the Terminus bombing, he would freely admit to other bombings as well, his apartment subsequently being found to contain material to make many more devices.

As I have already quoted Henry’s courtroom address previously, I shall not repeat it here. Instead, I offer two other documents. The first is a record of Émile Henry’s court interrogation that is provided by the same French historian who found the police interrogation of Vaillant and this reads as follows:

“Prosecutor: On February 12 you entered the Café Terminus.

Émile Henry: Yes, at eight o’clock.

P: Your bomb was in your pants belt.

EH: No, in my overcoat pocket.

P: Why did you go to the Cafe Terminus?

EH: I had first gone to Bignon, the Café de la Paix and the Americain but there weren't enough people. So I went to the Terminus and I waited.

P: There was an orchestra. How long did you wait?

EH: An hour.

P: Why?

EH: So that there would be a bigger crowd.

P: And then?

EH: You know full well.

P: I'm asking you.

EH: I threw away my cigar! I lit the fuse and then taking the bomb in my hand I left and, as I was leaving the café, from the doorway I threw the bomb.

P: You hold human life in contempt.

EH: No, the life of bourgeois.

P: You did everything you could to save yours.

EH: Yes, so I could start again. I counted on leaving the cafe, closing the door, getting a ticket at the Saint-Lazare station, escaping, and starting over the next day.

P: As you left you met a waiter. Further on a certain Etienne detained you saying: "I've got you, you wretch!" You answered: "Not yet." What did you then do?

EH: I fired at him.

P: He fell. What did you say?

EH: That he was lucky that I didn't have a better revolver.

P: Then you were detained by a hairdresser. What did you do?

EH: I shot him with the revolver.

P: He was hit and hasn't healed. Agent Poisson followed you.

EH: At this moment, since a crowd was gathering, I stopped. I waited for Agent Poisson and fired three shots at him with my revolver.

P: You were then arrested, and the policemen had a hard time tearing you from the fury of the crowd.

EH: Which didn't know what I'd done.

P: You had special bullets on you. Why?

EH: To cause more harm.

P: And a dagger on which there was a preparation.

EH: I had poisoned the blade in order to strike an anarchist informer.

P: You were determined to strike the agent with that weapon?

EH: Certainly.

P: You were seated at a table near the door and had thrown the device in front of you. Why didn't you hit more people with that explosion, since you had aimed at the orchestra?

EH: I threw the bomb too high. It hit a lamp and went off course.

P: A muffled explosion was heard and the cafe was completely destroyed: tables, mirrors, woodwork were broken. There were many wounded: twenty. One of them, M. Borde has since died. His leg was covered with wounds. Another, M. Van Herreweghen received forty wounds. There were women: Mme Kingsbourg, who is still suffering from her wounds, many others that you will hear. And these women were so terrified that they have hidden their presence and their wounds. You said that the more bourgeois that die the better it would be.

EH: That's just what I think.

P: At first you said you were called Breton. A little later you revealed yourself and you said that your name is Émile Henry and you gave the design of your device. How was it made?

EH: It was a small kettle of tin containing a detonator and a fuse.

P: You said that you had been relatively unsuccessful. What does that mean?

EH: I wanted to kill more, but the kettle wasn't properly closed.

P: You had put projectiles in it.

EH: I had put 120 pellets.

P: Vaillant, who said he wanted to wound and not kill, had put nails and not pellets.

EH: Me, I wanted to kill and not wound.

P: Your domicile wasn't known.

EH: I had said that I didn't have a domicile in Paris, I declared that I arrived from Marseilles or Peking.

P: Soon afterwards a room at the Villa Faucheur was robbed. The Police superintendent finds explosives and recognizes that this is your home.

EH: I don't know who robbed my home.

P: You were warned that your domicile has been discovered and at that point you declared that quantities of explosives must have been found at your home.

EH: I had enough to make twelve to fifteen bombs.

P: [To the jury] You know the crime and the accused, who has just cynically confessed his crime.

EH: It's not cynicism, it's conviction.

P: Did you want to kill the waiter Etienne?

EH: I wanted to kill all those who put themselves in the way of my escape.

P: Did you want to kill the Agent Poisson?

EH: Certainly. His sabre was raised and he would have killed me.

P: Did you want to kill the people at the Hotel Terminus?

EH: Certainly, as many as possible.

P: Did you want to destroy the building?

EH: Oh, I could care less!

The Presiding Judge to the Jury: This would suffice to establish the guilt of the accused. But whatever the crime, justice — and this is our honour — never deviates from the usual rules.

We must examine all the details and pause before another act for which the accused is reproached. Your father lived at Brevannes, then he went to Spain, took part in the Paris Commune, and your mother found herself a widow with three children. You received a grant at the Ecole J-B Say, at seventeen you qualified for admission to the Ecole Polytechnique. You didn't continue.

EH: In order not to be a soldier and be forced to fire on the unfortunate, like at Fourmies [the site of a police attack on demonstrators]

P: You found a job with a builder, M. Bordenave, your relative. How much did you earn?

EH: In Venice I earned 100F a month.

P: Why did you leave?

EH: For reasons foreign to the affair.

P: You said that he wanted to force you to carry out a secret surveillance, which revolted you. M. Bordenave when questioned protested.

EH: He recognized that there was a misunderstanding.

P: You then found another job.

EH: I suffered through three months of poverty before this!

P: In any event, you soon had a position.

EH: A quite mediocre one: 100 to 120 F a month.

P: At this moment you come under the influence of one of your brothers. A short while later you were arrested after a meeting in honour of Ravachol, and your boss found anarchist works in your desk, most notably a translation of an Italian newspaper indicating how to make nitroglycerine and in which we read: 'Long live theft, long live dynamite!' We can see there the rules you put in practice in the attack on the Rue des Bons-Enfants. So then your boss fired you.

EH: I was fired when these papers were found.

P: You looked for work at a watchmaker's. Then you were employed by L'En-Dehors [the most famous French individualist anarchist publication, set up by Zo d'Axa in 1891], edited by Matha, who was condemned in 1892 — the year you arrived at the newspaper — for inciting insubordination among soldiers. You refused to be a soldier.

EH: I had done three years of school battalion and that was all I could do as a soldier.

P: You avoided the call to military service and your mother disapproved of you.

EH: She feared my expatriation.

P: On the recommendation of Ortiz, a burglar, you went to work for M. Dupuis.

EH: I don't know what Ortiz has done since I knew him.

P: M. Dupuis had increased your salary.

EH: I had much affection for him.

P: Would you like to repeat before the jury the confessions you made during the questioning? I would very much like it to be you that speaks.

EH: Certainly. Tomorrow I'll give the motives for my act. The Société des Carmaux is represented in Paris by its administration. After the strike I bought a kettle. I had dynamite, a primer, fuses.

[The questioning continues. The accused refuses to say what he did during 1893. During a difficult period in the questioning the Presiding Judge shouts: Beware of your silence!]

EH: I don't care. I don't have to beware of my silence. I know full well that I'll be condemned to death.

P: Listen; I think there's a confession that's damaging to your pride. Vaillant admitted that he received 100 F from a burglar. You don't want to recognize that you extended your hand to receive the money from a theft, the hand that we today see covered in blood.

EH: My hands are covered in blood, like your red robe is! In any case, I don't have to answer you.

P: You are accused and it's my duty to interrogate you.

EH: I don't recognize your justice.

P: You don't recognize justice. Unfortunately for you, you are in its hands, and the jury will be able to appreciate this.

EH: I know!

The Presiding Judge: Be seated."

The second document I have to share in relation to Émile Henry is "Letter to the Director of the Conciergerie" which was written by him in jail two weeks after he had thrown the bomb in the Café Terminus which killed one and injured twenty. In it, he is much more expansive about his motives and reasoning. It reads as follows:

*"During the visit you made to my cell Sunday, the 18th of this month, we had a quite friendly discussion of anarchist ideas. You said you were very surprised to learn our theories in a different light, and you asked me to summarize our conversation in writing, in order to better know what the anarchists want. You can easily understand, Monsieur, that in just a few pages one can't expound upon a theory which analyses our current social life in all of its manifestations, that studies these manifestations the way a doctor examines a sick body, and which then condemns them because they're contrary to human happiness and, in place of them, builds an entirely new life, based on principles completely antagonistic to those upon which the old society was built. Besides, others have already done what you ask of me: Kropotkin, Reclus, Sébastien Faure have set forth their ideas, and pushed their development as far as possible. Read *Évolution et Révolution* by Reclus, *La Morale Anarchiste*, *Les Paroles d'un Révolté*, *La Conquete du Pain* by Peter Kropotkin; *Autorité et Liberté*, *Le Machinisme et ses Conséquences* by Sébastien Faure; *La Société Mourante et l'Anarchie* by Grave; *Entre Paysans (Fra Contadini)* by Malatesta; read also the numerous pamphlets and manifestos that have appeared over the last fifteen years, each expounding new ideas, according to*

whether study or circumstances suggested them to their authors. Read all of this and then you would form a well-founded judgment on anarchy.

Nevertheless, don't think that anarchism is a dogma, a doctrine that can't be attacked, indisputable, venerated by its followers as the Koran is by Muslims. No, the absolute freedom that we call for ceaselessly expands our ideas, raises them towards new horizons (following the will of diverse individuals) and removes them from the rigid frameworks of regimentation and codification. We are not 'believers;' we don't bow before Reclus or Kropotkin. We debate their ideas, we accept them when they develop sympathetic impressions in our brains, but we reject them when they don't strike a chord within us. We are far from possessing the blind faith of the collectivists, who believe in something because Guesde said it had to be believed in, and who have a catechism whose paragraphs it would be sacrilegious to dispute. This being established, I am going to try to briefly and rapidly expound for you what I understand by anarchy, without involving other comrades who, on certain points, could have views different from mine.

You would not dispute the fact that the current social system is evil, and the proof that it is, is that everyone suffers from it. From the poor itinerant, with neither bread nor roof, who knows constant hunger, to the millionaire, who lives in fear of a revolt of the poor that would trouble his digestion, all of humanity lives in a state of anxiety. On what bases does bourgeois society rest? Putting aside the principles of family, fatherland, and religion, which are nothing but corollaries, we can affirm that the two cornerstones, the two fundamental principles of the current state, are authority and property. I don't want to go on any longer on this subject: it would be easy for me to prove that all the ills we suffer from flow from property and authority. Poverty, theft, crime, prostitution, war, revolution are all nothing but the results of these principles. The two bases of society being thus evil, there is no

reason to hesitate. There's no need to try any of a group of palliatives (e.g. socialism) that serve only to shift the wrong. The two vicious germs must be destroyed, and eradicated from social life.

This is why we anarchists want to replace private property with communism, and authority with freedom. No more deeds of possession or domination: absolute equality. When we say absolute equality we don't claim that all men will have the same brain, the same physical organization: we know that there will always be the greatest diversity in cerebral and physical aptitudes. It is precisely this variety of capacities that will bring into being the production of all that is necessary for humanity, and we count on this as well to maintain emulation in an anarchist society. There will be engineers and labourers: this is obvious. But one will not be considered superior to the other, since the work of the engineer is useless without the collaboration of the labourer, and vice versa. Everyone being free to choose his trade, there will exist only beings that obey, without any constraints, the leanings nature places in them (guarantee of good productivity). Here a question must be asked: And the lazy? Will everyone want to work? We answer yes, everyone will want to work, and here is why: Today, the average workday is ten hours. Many workers are kept busy at labours that are absolutely useless to society, in particular on armaments for the army and navy. Many are also unemployed. Add to this a considerable number of able-bodied men who produce nothing: soldiers, priests, policemen, magistrates, civil servants, etc. We can thus say, without being accused of exaggeration, that of a hundred capable of producing some kind of labour, only fifty furnish an effort truly useful to society. It is these fifty who produce all of society's riches. From this flows the deduction that if everyone worked, instead of ten hours the workday would decrease to only five.

Beyond this we should consider that in the current state of things the total of manufactured products is four times, and of agricultural products three times, the amount required to meet humanity's needs; which is to say that a humanity three times more numerous would be clothed, housed, heated, fed; in a word, would have all of its needs satisfied if waste and other causes didn't destroy that overproduction. (You will find these statistics in the little pamphlet: 'The Products of the Land and of Industry'). From what has gone before, we can draw the following conclusion: A society where all would work together, and which would be satisfied with productivity not far beyond its consumer needs (the excess of the first over the second would constitute a small reserve), would have to ask of each of its able-bodied members an effort of only two or three hours, perhaps less. Who would then refuse to give such a small quantity of labour? Who would want to live with the shame of being held in contempt by all and being considered a parasite?

Now, property and authority march together, the one supporting the other to keep humanity enslaved. What is the right to property? Is it a natural right? Is it legitimate that one eats while the other fasts? No. Nature, in creating us, made us with similar organisms, and the labourer's stomach demands the same satisfaction as that of the financier. Nevertheless, one class today has taken all, stealing from the other class the bread not only of its body, but also of its soul. Yes, in a century that we call one of progress and of science, is it not painful to think of the millions of intelligences hungry for knowledge and that cannot flourish? How many children of the common man, who could have become men and women of great value, useful to humanity, will never know anything but the few indispensable notions taught in elementary school. Property! That is the enemy of human happiness, for it alone creates inequality, and in its train hatred, envy, bloody revolt... Established authority serves no other purpose than the sanctioning of property. It is there to put force at the service of the act of despoiling.

Work being a natural need you will accept along with me that no one would flee from the demand of as minimal an effort as that which we spoke of above. (Labour is so natural a need that History shows us several statesmen treating themselves with joy from the cares of politics to work as simple labourers: To cite two well-known cases: Louis XVI worked with locks, and in our day Gladstone, 'The Great Old Man' profits from his vacations to himself chop down some of the oaks of his forests, like a common lumberjack.) So you see, Monsieur, there would be no reason to have recourse to the law to avoid the problem of idlers. But if in some extraordinary case someone wanted to refuse his assistance to his brothers, it would still be less costly to feed this unfortunate, who can only be described as sick, than to maintain legislators, magistrates, police and prison wardens to break him down.

Many other questions arise, but they are of a secondary nature, the most important thing being to establish that the suppression of property would not cause a cessation of production due to the development of laziness, and that anarchist society would know how to feed itself and satisfy all of its needs. All the other objections that can be raised will be easily refuted by taking inspiration from the idea that an anarchist milieu would cause to grow in each of its members the love of, and solidarity with, his like, for man will know that in working for others he works for himself.

A seemingly better-founded objection is the following: If there is no more authority, if there is no fear of the gendarme to stop the criminal's arm, don't we risk seeing crimes and misdemeanours multiply at a frightening rate? The answer is easy: We can categorize the crimes committed today in two principal categories; crimes of interest and crimes of passion. The first group will disappear on its own, since there can be no attacks on property in a milieu which has done away with property. As for the second group, no law can stop

them. Far from this being the case, the current law — which acquits a husband who kills his adulterous wife — does nothing but favour the frequency of these crimes. On the contrary, an anarchist milieu would raise the moral level of humanity. Man will understand that he has no rights over a woman who gives herself to another man, since that woman does nothing but follow her nature. Consequently crimes, in a future society, will become increasingly rare, until they disappear completely.

Monsieur, I am going to summarize for you my ideal of an anarchist society. No more authority, which is far more contrary to human happiness than the few excesses that could occur at the beginning of a free society. In place of the current authoritarian organization, the grouping of individuals by sympathies and affinities without laws or leaders. No more private property; the gathering in common of products; each one working and consuming according to his needs, which is to say, as he wishes. No more family, selfish and bourgeois, making man the property of woman and woman the property of man; no more demanding of two beings who loved each other but a moment that they remain attached till the end of their days. Nature is capricious: it always demands new sensations. It wants free love. This is why we want free unions. No more fatherlands, no more hatred between brothers, pitting against each other men who have never set eyes on each other. Replacement of the narrow and petty attachment of the chauvinist for his country by the large and fruitful love of all of humanity, without distinction of race or colour. No more religions, forged by priests to degrade the masses and give them the hope of a better life, while they themselves enjoy life in the here and now. On the contrary, the continual expansion of the sciences, put within the grasp of every being who will feel attached to their study, little by little bringing all men to a materialist consciousness. The particular study of hypnotic phenomena, which science is beginning to become aware of, in order to unmask the charlatans who present to the ignorant, in a marvellous and superstitious light, facts which are purely physical. In a word,

absolutely no more hindrances to the free development of human nature. The free blossoming of physical, cerebral and mental faculties.

I am not so optimistic as to believe that a society built on such foundations will arrive at perfect harmony. But I have the profound conviction that two or three generations will suffice to tear mankind from the influence of the artificial civilization which it submits to today and to return it to the state of nature, which is the state of goodness and of love. But in order to make victorious this ideal, to set anarchist society on a solid base, we must begin with the work of destruction. The old, worm-eaten edifice must be torn down. This is what we are doing. The bourgeoisie claims that we will never arrive at our goal. The future, the very near future, will teach them. Vive l'Anarchie!"

Without being patronising to Henry, that is quite a wide-ranging, if concisely described, conception of anarchy for one of college age. Henry believes in a better and fairer social organisation which penetrates beyond working conditions to family life and he believes in the educated self-consciousness of all human beings such that they willingly, of themselves, cooperate on projects of social significance. This is not a man motivated by hate but a man motivated to end material inequality and enforced deprivation – the things he views as the real crimes in society. And, what's more, in a way precisely imitated by V in V4V, he believes that what holds this back must be destroyed before a new world of human relationships can come.

The deaths of Vaillant and Henry, at the hands of the state, had their own further effects. One of those they impacted upon especially was the Italian son of a peasant family, Sante Caserio. His father had died while he was young from a deficient diet and, aged only 10, he left the family home and went to Milan where he got a job as an apprentice to a baker

and later met his first anarchists. Whilst in Milan he joined the anarchist group “On Foot” (which meant “without money”) and he shared bread with unemployed people along with anarchist pamphlets he printed himself from the proceeds of his poor salary. In 1892, not yet even 20 years old, he was imprisoned for his sharing of anarchist literature. Later, when singled out and identified at a demonstration in Italy, he was forced to flee the country, first to Switzerland and then to France and the anarchist stronghold of Lyon. In June 1894, incensed at what had happened to Vaillant and Henry, a 20 year old Caserio would stab the French President, Marie François Sadi Carnot, to death after a banquet as an act of vengeance and retribution. Like the three men I have concentrated on before him, he suffered death by guillotine for his actions. I have two documents to present in relation to Sante Caserio as well. The first is a brief document reporting on his trial. The second is his equally brief defence speech to the court. I reproduce them one after the other as follows:

“Recalling the childhood of Caserio, the president said to him, ‘You attended school but you never received any prizes.’ Caserio answered, ‘I regret not having had more education. I would have been stronger.’

Q: And what would you have done with that strength?

A: I would have used it for the ideal.

Questioned about his relations with the lawyer Gori [a key Italian anarchist of the time], he answered: ‘I didn’t frequent Gori’s conferences in 1891, but I read pamphlets and I paid closer attention to what was in them than to those he signed. In any case, I will lay out my doctrines.’

The president then asked him about his relations with the Italian anarchists, but Caserio remained silent on this point. ‘I am a baker,’ he said, ‘not a policeman ...’

Q: Recount your crime, Caserio.

A: At the moment when the last cavalymen of the escort passed in front of me, I opened my jacket. The dagger was in the inside right-hand pocket, against my chest, with the handle up. I grabbed it with my left hand and with one movement shoved the two young people standing in front of me, took the handle with my right hand, and with my left pushed off the sheath, which fell to the ground. I quickly, but without leaping, headed straight for the president, following an oblique line in the direction opposite that of the carriage's movement. I put my left hand on the edge of the carriage and, with a slightly downward blow, my palm backward and my fingers pointed down, I plunged my dagger into the president's breast up to the hilt. (And Caserio, with an unspeakable cynicism, demonstrated the way he used the dagger against the president.) My hand touched his jacket. I left the dagger in the president's chest and a piece of newspaper remained on the handle. In delivering the blow I shouted -loudly or not, I don't know- 'Vive la Révolution!' When I struck him M. Carnot looked me in the face. I then retreated, shouting 'Vive la Révolution.'

Q: You said that the president's look produced a strong sensation in you.

A: I felt no emotion.

Q: You wanted to strike him in the heart but your blow was delivered lower than you'd thought. Once the blow was delivered you fled. Seeing that you weren't immediately arrested and that no one seemed to have understood what you'd done you started running, shouting 'Vive l'Anarchie.' You were going to disappear in the crowd. They refused to let you pass. Someone behind you shouted, 'Arrest him!' Twenty policemen grabbed you and locked you up in a sure place. (M. Breuillac then told of M. Carnot's final moments. The best doctors of our city did all they could to save so precious a life.) The result of your dagger blow, Caserio, was M. Carnot's death. You know this?

A: (In a weak voice) Yes, I know.

Q: And it's because you are an anarchist that you killed M. Carnot. You hate all heads of state?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: You premeditated your crime. You admit this.

A: I'll answer in my declaration.

Ending his questioning the president of the tribunal said to Caserio, 'Outside your political crime you killed a mother and father.' Caserio then expounded at length in Italian. 'No one had pity for the wives and children of the anarchists guillotined in France, hung in America, shot by firing squads in Spain.' The interpreter was hardly able to translate the accused's words, which he mangled, giving rise to protests from the journalists."

And now Caserio's defence speech:

"Gentlemen of the jury, I'm not going to defend myself but rather explain my action. While still young I learned that present society is poorly organized, so poorly that every day many unfortunates commit suicide, leaving wives and children in the most terrible distress. Workers in their thousands look for work and can't find any. Poor families beg for their food and shiver from the cold. They suffer the worst poverty. The youngest ask their poor mothers for food and the latter can't give them any because they don't have anything. The few things that were in the house were already sold or traded. All they can do is ask for alms; they're often arrested for vagabondage.

I left my native land because I was often brought to tears upon seeing little girls of eight or ten forced to work fifteen hours a day for a miserable wage of twenty centimes. Young women of eighteen or twenty also work twenty hours a day for a laughable salary. And this

doesn't only happen to my compatriots, but to all workers who sweat all day long for a morsel of bread while their labour brings in money in abundance. The workers are forced to live under the most wretched conditions and their food consists of a bit of bread, a few spoonfuls of rice, and water. And so when they reach the age of thirty or forty they're dying of fatigue and die in hospitals. What's more, as a consequence of their poor diets and overwork these sad creatures are devoured in their hundreds by pellagra, an illness that, in my country, attacks, as the doctors say, those who are malnourished and who lead a hard and deprived existence.

I saw that there are some people who are hungry and some children who suffer while food and clothing are abundant in the cities. I saw several great industries full of clothing and wool products and I also saw warehouses full of wheat and corn that would be suitable for those who needed them. And from another point of view, I saw thousands of people who don't work, who produce nothing, and who live thanks to the labour of others; who every day spend thousands of francs to amuse themselves; who corrupt the daughters of workers; who own lodgings with forty or fifty rooms, twenty or thirty horses, and several servants: in a word, all the pleasures of life. I believe in God, but when I see such inequality among men, I recognize that it isn't God who created man but man who created God. And I discovered that those who want their property respected have an interest in preaching paradise and hell and keeping the people in a state of ignorance.

A short time ago, Vaillant threw a bomb in the Chamber of Deputies in protest against the current system of society. He killed no one and only wounded a few people. But bourgeois justice condemned him to death. And not satisfied with the condemnation of the guilty man, it pursued the anarchists and arrested not only those who knew Vaillant, but even those who attended an anarchist lecture. The government didn't think of their wives and

children. It didn't consider that a man held in a cell isn't the only one to suffer, that his little ones ask for bread. Bourgeois justice didn't trouble itself with these innocents, who don't even know what society is. It's not their fault if their fathers are in prison; all they want to do is eat. The government went so far as to search people's private homes, to open personal letters, to prohibit lectures and meetings and practiced the most infamous oppression against us. Even today hundreds of anarchists are arrested for having written an article in a newspaper or for having expressed an opinion in public.

Well then, if the government employs guns, chains, and prisons against us, must we anarchists, who defend our lives, remain locked in our houses? No. On the contrary, we answer governments with dynamite, bombs, the stylus, and the dagger. In a word, we must do all we can to destroy the bourgeoisie and government. Gentlemen of the jury, you who are the representatives of bourgeois society, if you want my head, take it. But don't think that in doing so you are stopping the anarchist movement. Beware: man reaps what he sows."

Mitchell Abidor, the translator and anthologiser of a great many individualist and illegalist texts from either side of 1900, begins his book on this, *Down With the Law*, which collects together texts by eight such writers, in the following way:

"It is perhaps ironic that France, the country of great mass revolutions, of 1789, of 1830, of 1848, of the Commune of 1871, of the Popular Front strikes of 1936 and the uprising of May 1968, gave birth to the most diverse and influential group of anarchist individualist thinkers, writers, and militants. Or perhaps it is precisely because of France's revolutionary history that individualism took such firm root. If we examine the country's revolutions and mass movements, what is abundantly clear is that for all its revolutionary fervour, for all

the bloodshed and sacrifice, in every case the revolution either served the interests of people other than the workers who made them, or were bloody failures that set the movement back decades.

*This failure of the revolutions and mass organizations up to the end of the nineteenth century led to two diametrically opposed reactions among anarchists. On the one hand, there were those who, rather than lose heart and faith in the mass movement, flocked to the revolutionary wing of the Left, particularly syndicalism. For these militants the error was not believing in mass activity, but carrying it out incorrectly. For these people the revolution remained a distinct possibility that would occur in the not-too-distant future. This current included men such as Émile Pouget, editor of *Le Père Peinard*, a newspaper written in popular slang and advocating direct action by the workers, most notably through sabotage. This rebirth of the revolutionary far Left in fin-de-siècle France was the main reason the age of the bomb throwers, of Ravachol, Émile Henry, and August Vaillant, ended so abruptly in 1894: these men had hoped to inspire a mass movement, and once that movement appeared—inspired by them or not—continuing their campaign of terror was unnecessary.*

On the other hand, there were those who believed there was no hope for revolution, that the masses, timid, cowed, and uneducated, would never be able to overthrow their masters, or at least not until a long period of education had occurred. Anarchist individualism critiqued the revolutionary illusion, an alternative to the apparently futile attempts to change the world, to the sacrificing of present generations to hypothetical future ones. Anarchist individualists turned things on their head and posited the possibility of liberation today, a liberation within the reach of all at this very moment."

We see both of these instincts in the characters I have pulled out and highlighted above but also in the characterisation of V in V4V. They all almost certainly wanted revolution but, at the same time, they weren't shy about acting alone based on their own feelings, motives and acquired expertise and, indeed, one had to come before the other. So none of these men, actual or fictional, felt they needed anyone's authorisation to do what they did besides their own compassion and concern for the systematic crushing of others and their desire to relieve it. Abidor, in fact, talks about an age split between those more socially (revolutionary) inclined and those more autonomously (insurrectionary) inclined (a distinction Max Stirner makes as well for other reasons). It will be noted, of course, that Ravachol and Vaillant were in their early 30s whilst Henry and Caserio were barely over 20 years of age. But age is no barrier to deep feeling or conviction or, indeed, authenticity of action. Abidor's suggestion that the individualists would combine (in their separate but cumulative effects) to constitute an "anarchy within anarchy" is an idea I very much approve of concerning a subject where dogma should always be banished and tactics should be bespoke and according to those directly concerned – their own direct, and self-organised and self-determined action. His suggestion that the individualists, historically, saw organisational anarchists as but the softer edge of the societal problem they sought to confront (Abidor actually refers to "a worm-ridden anarchist ship too timid to effect any real change". not something we could accuse V of) also finds favour with me.

As I have had cause to point out before, the idea that "anarchists" are working towards some mythical revolution which will change the world (which Moore takes up in his characterisation of V, I must admit) is an idea that is, and should be, long out of date as the fantasy of people all too willing to believe in happy endings. (Here I would then mildly criticise V himself but his plan is only to offer people the choice of this. Its up to them if they make it or not.) The individually acting illegalists such as I have referenced in this

section of this book, I suggest, were, in general, often much more those who had divested themselves of the dogma of such folklorish, if not theological, notions and determined to live life on their own terms, an insurrection made now which might catch on or might not – and for a while in historical reality this meant the fad of “illegalism”. So, as Mitchell Abidor discusses this:

“the scholar Marie-Josephe Dhavernas wrote, ‘Individualists give the word ‘freedom’ the sense of the maximum realization by each of his own tendencies and needs, of his own internal laws opposed to the external laws imposed by society.’ Or as Henri Zisly, an early anarchist individualist, said in the pages of its main organ, L’Anarchie: ‘To be an anarchist means absolutely living outside established laws; it’s wanting to follow the pure theory, to not work for a boss. It’s being completely free of bourgeois prejudices; it’s being a supporter of violent methods of social struggle.’”

V, it seems, would have agreed with Zisly in this. Such would also have been the ideas floating in the air to which Ravachol, Vaillant, Henry and Caserio were regularly exposed along with the belief that everyone had the right to develop their own ideas, that there were no canonical texts or figures and that individual autonomy and self-responsibility were something to aspire to. This would be true even if they didn’t also exist in the flow of texts produced by Bakunin, Kropotkin and others which gained credence among those of anarchist conviction and built an active European anarchist movement of several thousands in the latter part of the nineteenth century. We can see from those above that they, like V in fiction, did have social concerns and deeply felt social oppressions, not just on behalf of themselves but others as well. Individualism does not necessarily preclude such interests although, for the strict individualist, class-based struggle plays little part. In fact, individualists (even hybrid ones like Emma Goldman) could often be accused of

having a barely disguised contempt for the masses whom they perceived as dull, sleeping fools often complying with, and so enabling, their own exploitation – and even going so far as to help with that of others. V, in V4V, is equally forthright about who is to blame and what the solution is (as is Alan Moore when talking about politics in interviews and conversations). His violence then exists in order to give people access to a choice their previous somnambulism has denied them.

Here Henry's complaint, for example, was that the bourgeoisie AS A CLASS were guilty and it is obviously true that the forces of coercion need a solid bed of humanity to carry that coercion out or otherwise look the other way. This could be a class or group of people or it could just be all of them except those who have obviously woken from their encouraged stupor. Those of such individualist views towards the masses were usually also those who thought the idea of any revolution coming from such people was utterly laughable. Even more social anarchists heavily emphasised the necessity of education. For the pure individualists, however, it wasn't just the state or the government who was the enemy; it was the enablers and the bystanders who did nothing as well. It is ordinary men and women who guard the prisoners and make the prison viable by working as prison guards. The bombs of illegalists were both them taking matters into their own hands and a judgment on those they targeted who "deserved it" as a consequence.

Another example of the thought of that time is provided by the Frenchman, Zo d'Axa, who founded the individualist anarchist paper, *L'En-Dehors* (The Outside) and was caught up in the "villainous" French laws which outlawed anarchist propaganda as a result of the bombings I have detailed (and which he would often encourage). Even the title of his paper demonstrates the attitude of its writers and readers. They did not feel part of society and wanted to distinguish themselves from it. They were not those who went

along with it but they stood opposed to it. The short column "Us", from 1892, gives an example of the kinds of things Zo d'Axa wrote for anarchist consumption:

"They talk of anarchy. The dailies are roused. Comrades are interviewed and 'L'Éclair', among other things, says that there is a split among the anarchists. It's on the matter of theft that opinions are divided. Some, it is said, want to build it into a principle; others irrevocably condemn it. Well! It would be impossible for us to take a position on such a question. This theft could seem to us good and should be approved; that one we could find violently repugnant. There is no Absolute. If the facts lead us today to specify such and such a way to see and be, every day, in the lively articles of our expressive collaborators, our determination has been clearly affirmed: Neither in a party or a group. Outside.

We go our way — individuals, without the Faith that saves and blinds. Our disgust with society doesn't engender in us any immutable convictions. We fight for the joy of the battle, and without any dream of a better future. What do we care about tomorrows that won't come for centuries! What do we care about our grand-nephews! We are outside of all laws, of all rules, of all theories — even anarchist; it's from this instant — right away — that we want to surrender to our pity, our outbursts, our gentleness, our rages, our instincts — with the pride of being ourselves. Up till now nothing has revealed to us the radiant beyond. Nothing has given us a constant criterion. Life's panorama changes without ceasing, and the facts appear to us under a different light depending on the hour. We will never react against the attractions of contradictory points of view. It is simple. The echo of vibrant sensations resounds here. And if impetuosity disorients by its unexpectedness, it's because we speak of the things of our time as would primitive barbarians who have suddenly fallen among them. Theft!

It would never occur to us to pose as judges. There are thieves who displease us: that's certain; and that we'd attack: that's probable. But that would be for their allure rather than for the brute fact. We will not put in play eternal Truth — with a capital T. It's a matter of impression. A hunchback could displease me more than an amiable recidivist."

It is not my argument here, of course, that any of those I have focused on earlier in this section of my book espoused these exact views. My point is only that these views were current and rolled around the streets of especially Paris and Lyon amongst the anarchists of the day. Some would have wholly accepted them; others saw their point but were not uniquely inspired by them; yet others would have preferred more social anarchist sentiments or created their own hybrid of anarchist views. This is the reality of what Moore labels "The Land of Do-As-You-Please". In the same year, however, in another column, Zo d'Axa focused on "The Bourse, the Palace of Justice, and the Chamber of Deputies" as legitimate sites of anarchist attack. Zo d'Axa here described "a sure means to pluck joy immediately" as to "destroy passionately" and V seems to engage in this both performatively, as what terrorism expert Katherine E. Brown calls "terrorism as a communicative act", and enthusiastically. The 1890s was the age of propaganda of the deed and making a public mark in an attempt to jump start popular revolt. This is exactly how V is characterised by Alan Moore and David Lloyd.

Perhaps a better, and final, context for the acts of the men above, and V himself, is then provided in the story of Clément Duval. Duval was influential in the development of anarchist illegalism, most notably after breaking into the house of a wealthy Parisian to steal 15,000 francs before accidentally setting the place on fire. Trying to get rid of his booty, he was caught and stabbed a gendarme in the ensuing struggle (who survived). As with my earlier characters, I will quote two documents here, the first his defence speech

in court and the second a letter he wrote in jail that was published in the anarchist paper *Le Révolté*. Both were influential in informing future anarchist attitudes:

"While I do not recognize your right to pose to me the questions that you have, I have responded to you as the accused. Now, you are the ones that I am accusing. I do not pretend to defend myself. To what end would this serve me, in front of those as well armed as you, having soldiers, cannons, police, and finally an army of mercenaries as your henchmen? Let's be logical, you are in power, taking advantage of it, and if you still need the head of yet another anarchist, take it, and when our day comes we will take this into account, and I have the firm hope that on that day the anarchists will rise to the occasion. They will be without pity, because never will they reach the number of your victims. It is not only you who I am addressing, but to all of this selfish, cruel, corrupt society, where on one side we see an orgy and on the other misery!

You have accused me of theft, as if a worker that has nothing could be a thief. No, theft exists only in the exploitation of man by man, in a word by those who live at the expense of the working class. It was not a theft that I committed, but a just restitution made in the name of humanity, this money was to serve for making revolutionary propaganda, through writing and by the deed. To make newspapers and leaflets to show people the truth; it has been a long time that they have been deceived. To show the cure to those who are ill. I busy myself with the chemistry and prepare what is needed for the day of battle, the day when the workers, conscious, will leave their torpor, their slump. Because it is time that this diabolic machination of the old world disappear, to give place to institutions where all will find a fate that is more fair, which does not exist but within anarchist communism. Because anarchy is the negation of all authority. And anarchy is the biggest social wound, because

man is not free, and one must become free to do all that one wants, as long as one does not infringe upon the liberty of their fellow- of then one would become a despot in turn.

In communism, man gives to society according to his skills and strengths, and should receive according to his needs. Men group themselves, find each other according to their character, their skills, their affinities, taking as an example the group which functions the best, away from vanity, foolish pride, not seeking to do better than one's comrade for one can do better for one's self. Out of this will come the useful masterpieces, people's intelligence no longer reduced to nothing but capital, because men would be able to evolve freely, no longer under the despotic yoke of authority, of individual property. And these groups can mutually exchange their products, unhindered. Learning, and feeling good about governing themselves, they will federate and will be nothing more than a big family of workers associated together for the happiness of all - one for all, one for all - knowing only a single law: the law of solidarity and reciprocity. No more gold, base metal for which I am here and which I despise. Base metal, the cause of all the evils and vices that afflict humanity. Base metal, with which men's conscience is bought!

With anarchist communism, there is no more exploitation of man by man, no more of these managers of sweat, no more salesmen with a mercantile spirit, rapacious, selfish, poisoning, falsifying their products and their commodities, thereby bringing the degradation of mankind. You cannot deny this, because you see this all the way to the toy salesmen, who already poison with these toys the poor little creatures who are barely born. And these factories, where they play with the workers lives with an unparalleled shamelessness, like in the factories of white lead where in only a few months the workers find themselves paralysed and soon dead, or in the tinsmiths who in little time become bald, crippled, weakened in the bones and die in agony!

There are scientists who know that they can replace these unhealthy products with innocuous ones. The doctors who see these unfortunates twist in such agony and who leave things to continue, they allow these crimes against humanity to happen. It is even better, they decorate the heads of the factories, and they award them honorary awards in memory of the service they have given to industry and humanity. And how many of these unhealthy industries are there? The number would be too large to count them all, not to mention the foul and unhealthy capitalist prisons where the worker, imprisoned for ten or twelve hours is obligated, for the sake of conserving his family's bread, to incur the vexations, the humiliation of an insolent convict, missing only the whip for us all to recall the heyday of ancient slavery and medieval serfdom. And the unfortunate miners, imprisoned five or six hundred feet underground, seeing the light of day no more than once a week and when, tired of so much misery and suffering, they lift their heads to reclaim their right to sunlight and to the banquet of life: quickly the army is in the countryside at the service of the exploiters, and we shoot this scoundrel! The proof doesn't default.

And the exploitation of man by man is nothing compared to that experienced by women. Nature is already thankless in this regard, to make them sick 15 days of the month, but we hardly take this into account: flesh of profit, flesh for fun, this is the fate of women. How many young girls arrive from the countryside, full of strength and health, only to be enclosed in the workshops, in rooms where there is room for four and they are fifteen, twenty, without air, breathing nothing but pollution: hardships they are forced to self-impose. By six months they are anaemic. From there the sickness, weakness, and dislike of work that is not even sufficient to meet their needs drives these unfortunates to prostitution. What does society do for these victims? It rejects them from her breast, like the leper, puts them on the map, enrolls them with the police and makes informers of their lovers. And do you think the workers, with noble and generous sentiments, can see this

picture of the human life unfurling constantly before their eyes without being revolted? He who feels all these effects, who is constantly a victim of them, morally, physically, and materially: he who is taken at twenty years old to pay his taxes in blood, cannon fodder to defend the property and privileges of his masters: and if he returns from this butchery, he returns maimed or with a sickness that renders him half crippled, making him go from hospital to hospital serving therefore as experimental flesh for these messieurs of science. I know what I speak of, I who have returned from the carnage with two wounds and rheumatism, a sickness that has given me four years in the hospital and which prevents me from working six months of the year. As an incentive, if you do not have the courage to give them my head as they ask, I will die in prison. And these crimes are committed in broad daylight, after being plotted in the corridors of the government, under the influence of a clique, or the caprice of a woman, while shouting over the rooftops: The people are sovereign, The Nation is sovereign, and under the buzz words of patronage - Glory, Honour, Homeland, as if there were several homelands between all beings living on the same planet. No! The anarchists have but one party, and that is humanity.

It is also, in the name of civilization that exists these distant expeditions where thousands of men are killed with a savage ferocity. It is in the name of civilization that we plunder, that we burn, that we massacre an entire people who demand nothing [more] than to live peacefully in their homes. And these crimes are committed with impunity because the law doesn't cover this type of theft and armed robbery, au contraire: We award medals to those who have led all this carnage, medals to the mercenaries who have taken part, in memory of their good deeds, and these unconscious ones are proud to wear this insignia which is nothing but a diploma of assassination. But on the other hand, the law severely punishes the worker to whom society refuses the right to exist and who has the courage to take what is necessary which he lacks, where there is superfluous amounts. Oh! And then this one is

treated like a thief, brought before the court and finally returns to end his days in prison. Voila! The logic of our current society. Ah well, this is the crime that I am here for: for not recognizing the right of these people to die of plenty while the producers, the creators of all social wealth, starve. Yes, I am the enemy of individual property and it has been a long time that I have said, along with Proudhon, that property is theft.

In effect, how does one acquire property, if not through theft, by exploiting one's fellows, giving three francs to the exploited for a job which will bring back ten for the exploiter? And the little exploiters don't do it any differently. Evidence: I have seen my companion do work as the second hand, two little detached pieces of lace and pearls, for which he was paid seven and a half centimes a piece. Fifteen days later, doing the same work as the first hand, he was paid fifty five centimes a piece. So do you think that a conscious worker could be so stupid as to do the lesser work to pay the rent and then give back to the same exploiter-owner a part of his salary which had been given to him? And he will see his wife and children forced to deprive themselves of things most necessary for life, while the idle, with this money, goes to the stock exchange or somewhere else to speculate, play the market on the misery of the people, or wallow in some fashionable boudoir in the arms of an unwell girl, who to live is forced to give her flesh to others for pleasure, despite the disgust that it inspires in her.

As I do not want myself to be made an accomplice of the likes of these dishonourables, this is why I do not pay rent (for which you reproach me), not wanting myself to be robbed by this thief, this vulture that we call an owner, and this is why I had received bad references in the different areas that I have lived. Good references are only given for the vile and the grovelling, for those who have no backbone. Because the law is in all things the accomplices of those who own, they throw away the anathema at the workers who lift their heads

proudly, who retain their dignity by revolting against abuse, injustices, against the monsters who make up the owning class.

But, it has been a long time since I have reckoned with anything but my conscience, mocking the fools and the wicked, feeling certain that I have the esteem of men of heart who have known me closely. This is why I am telling you: you are not condemning me as a thief, but as a conscious worker, who does not consider oneself to be a beast of burden, taxable and thanklessly exploited, and who recognizes the undeniable right that nature gives to all human beings: the right to existence. And if society refuses us this right, we must take it with unshaking hands (which would be a cowardice in a society where all abounds, where everything is in abundance, where what should be a source of well being is nothing more than a source of misery)... Why? Because everything is monopolized by a handful of idlers who burst from indigestion while the workers are continually searching for a loaf of bread.

No! I am not a robber but one who has been robbed, someone who brings justice, who says that everything belongs to everyone, and that it is this clear logic of the anarchist idea, which makes your legs tremble. No, I am not a thief but a sincere revolutionary, who has the courage of his convictions and who is devoted to his cause. Within current society, [where] money is the nerve of war, I would do all that is within my power to procure it to serve this noble and just cause which would purge humanity of all of the tyrannies, the persecutions that it has suffered so cruelly. Ah! I have only one regret, which is to have fallen too early into your hands, this preventing me from satisfying an implacable hatred, a thirst for vengeance that I have vowed upon so infamous a society. But what consoles me is that there are combatants that remain, because despite all the persecution, the anarchist idea has germinated and the theoretical revolution is ending, being quickly replaced by the

practice of action. Oh, then, that day - rotten society, governments, magistrates, exploiters of all kinds, you have lived! Long live social revolution, long live anarchy!"

"Companions,

Although I am not well known to you, you know that I am an anarchist. I am writing this letter to you to protest against the insanities that must have leaked out about me in particular and about the anarchists in general in all different kinds of newspapers which joined together to say, when I was arrested, that I was an ex-convict and had already been convicted of theft. As if you could call someone a thief who was a worker who had nothing but misery whereas for me theft does not exist except in the exploitation of man by man, in short, in the existence of everyone who lives at the expense of the producing class.

Here is why and how I committed the offence that they call theft. In 1870 I was, like so many others, stupid enough to go and defend the property and privileges of others; but I was 20 years old. From the war I brought back two wounds and rheumatism—a terrible sickness that has already cost me four years in the hospital. After serving as cannon fodder, I served as a guinea pig for the gentlemen of science. They made me take more than a kilo of sodium salicylate, which drastically weakened my eyesight. Proof is that at 36 years old I am wearing glasses and the bosses do not like that.

So, in 1878 I got out after three months in the hospital. I started working again for eight days; I got sick again; I stayed home for a month. I had two children and my companion got sick as well. No money and no bread in the house. Even though I was not part of the anarchist movement, which did not exist or was very small at the time (the study of sociology had not ended and it was still only in an embryonic state, plus they had not yet

cut off the heads of anarchists to spread it), I had already, long before, freed myself of the prejudices that block the minds of the masses, an enemy of all authority.

I was an anarchist in heart, in love with what was beautiful, grand, generous, revolting against all abuses and injustices. From this fact I recognized the undeniable right that nature gave to every human being: the right to exist. An opportunity presented itself. With no qualms I put my hand in a stationmaster's cash box. I took my hand out with 80 francs. 80 francs does not go far when you have nothing—medicine is expensive.

Therefore, I decided to go back and visit the stationmaster's cash box, telling myself, "So what? The company steals enough from its employees. I who have absolutely nothing can very well take a little of its surplus." What a bad idea because I was arrested there and sentenced to a year in prison. I am not embarrassed by this conviction, I take full responsibility. When society refuses you the right to exist, you have to take it and not help it along, which is cowardice.

There, companions, is the exact truth of my conviction. No companion knew about it, so I took sole responsibility for my actions and whoever takes advantage of human stupidity to try to discredit such a just and noble idea as the one that the anarchists defend, trying to dump on the whole of it the faults and wrongs (if faults and wrongs they are) of one of its defenders, is a cretin who trembles before the strict logic of the anarchist idea.

I thought that these explanations might be necessary for the anarchist companions, so I would appreciate it if you would include my letter in the next issue of Révolté.

Clément Duval, Mazas Prison, October 24 1886."

What I have done in this section of my discussion of *V for Vendetta*, then, is to construct a mini-history of violent and direct anarchism by V-like people, past and more present, possessed of anarchy's ethics and so a desire to refuse the law, refuse property, refuse authoritarianism, refuse coercive and exploitative human relations – with their anarchist desire to act against the atrocity they viewed as the governed civil society of their experience. This atrocity, I then insist, and despite its violence, both actual and fictional, is not the atrocity of anarchists who, in most cases and whatever they did, simply wanted bread to eat and a place to safely live with their families – or who wanted that opportunity for people in general – but it is a mini-record, a microcosm, of the atrocity of state and government, of capitalists, of the uncaring authoritarian disregard of human beings who have much, in both power and wealth, yet still insist on the sanctity of bourgeois laws and controlling idealistic and mythical principles over the reality of actual human lives, who insist on preserving vicious and increasing inequality of power and wealth over actual human lives by force and at gunpoint. This is what I call “atrocity” and “violence” (before we even get to the rhetorical fictional fascisms of V4V) and that is why I totally understand every bomb thrown, every shot fired, every dagger wielded, every door or window busted in, every fire set, every truck hijacked, every store robbed, every building bombed or fire-bombed, every plot and plan formulated to strike back against these things. After all, what are human beings expected to do? Acquiesce in their own systematic and deliberate annihilation? Just succumb to the systemic violence of Norsefire-like operations? (This is what they are expected to do, fictionally and actually.) That is not the anarchist way. The anarchist cannot acquiesce. The anarchist, in fact, must strike back – for themselves, for those they love, for the instantiation of anarchy's values upon the earth. In the creation of V, Alan Moore and David Lloyd understand this well and so present a credible example of the type – including the desire and need for the use of certain kinds of violence at the discretion of anarchist human beings.

Anarchism has, not entirely justly, seemingly always been linked with violence. Some anarchists (some might call them misguided and others not) have even perpetrated individual acts of it as we have discussed in the pages above. But anarchists more widely have often sought to contextualise such acts in the wider context of societal violence more generally for, whatever the case in regard to anarchist violence, it could not coherently be maintained by anybody that it is *only* anarchists who have ever been violent. “Violence”, then, is not a specifically or singularly or characteristic anarchist trait.

Anarchists themselves often point to the inherent violence of capitalist society itself in their discussions of violence. One example of this is Alexander Berkman. Berkman was an anarchist who, in 1892, made an anarchist attempt on a businessman’s life in order to rally striking workers, if not the whole working population, to the anarchist cause of anti-capitalism. He failed to kill the man, was captured, and served 14 years in prison for the crime. He then re-emerged from prison, in 1906, to continue his anarchist life in less violent, but not less committed, ways. He subsequently wrote pieces on violence and anarchism in both his lifelong friend Emma Goldman’s *Mother Earth* magazine, of which he was himself editor between 1907 and 1915, and in his own book, published in 1929, *What is Communist Anarchism?*, later reprinted as *ABC of Anarchism* by the Freedom Press of the UK - which is how I come by the book. In “Violence and Anarchism”, written in *Mother Earth* within a couple of years of his release from prison for the attempted murder, and barely a month after a further bomb in New York had seen him arrested by New York cops with extreme prejudice on the pretence of him having carried out the act (which he hadn’t), Berkman says of violence:

“Let us consider the matter dispassionately. Is violence specifically Anarchistic? Is the taking of human life such a very unusual occurrence among ‘civilized’ peoples? Is our whole social

existence anything but an uninterrupted series of murder, assassination, eradication? All our honored institutions are rooted in the very spirit of murder. Do we build warships for educational purposes? Is the army a Sunday school? Our police, jails, and penitentiaries - what purpose do they serve but to suppress, kill, and maim? Is the gallows the symbol of our brotherhood, the electric chair the proof of our humanitarianism?"

Berkman conceives, in the same article, of the American society he was at the time living in as "existing disorder" to which anarchism opposed "the science of social order" – an effective reversal of what the capitalist or anti-anarchist (such as there were in seemingly great numbers in the USA in 1908, not least among the authorities) might say. (In this, Alan Moore writes V as espousing the same beliefs – anarchy is order, violent, authoritarian fascism is chaos.) At this point in time he writes of the possibility of anarchism without any violent overtones. Indeed, he seems to conceive that such actions cannot bring about the anarchist society he seeks when he writes:

"This condition of social regeneration cannot be achieved by the will or act of any man or party. The enlightenment of the masses as to the evils of government, the awakening of the public conscience to a clear understanding of justice and equity—these are the forces which will abolish all forms of bondage, political, economical, and social, replacing present institutions by free co-operation and the solidarity of communal effort."

V, as written, agrees with this and Berkman, not condemning violence should it from time to time break out, contextualises it as the cries of the miserable and the degraded for relief and for aid, and puts the blame squarely on the shoulders of those who precipitated such misery and degradation:

"But the bomb?" cry the judges in and out of court. The bomb is the echo of your cannon, trained upon our starving brothers; it is the cry of the wounded striker; 'tis the voice of hungry women and children; the shriek of those maimed and torn in your industrial slaughterhouses; it is the dull thud of the policeman's club upon a defenseless head; 'tis the shadow of the crisis, the rumbling of suppressed earthquake—it is manhood's lightning out of an atmosphere of degradation and misery that king, president, and plutocrat have heaped upon humanity. The bomb is the ghost of your past crimes."

So Berkman, instead of giving an exegesis of the "crimes" of random bombers and assassins, exegetes the society in which such human beings are driven to such desperate acts (perhaps even in regard to his own, more youthful indiscretion) and meditates on the society which would produce them. He paints a picture of a violent society oppressing the majority of its citizens, backed up by the forces of the state and the clubs of police officers, for capitalistic ends and impugns that as by far the greater violence.

In his later piece, "Is Anarchism Violence?", an early chapter of his book *ABC of Anarchism*, Berkman begins by completely denying that anarchism is violence and states that "it is capitalism and government which stand for disorder and violence", adding that "Anarchism is the very reverse of it; it means order without government and peace without violence." Berkman then begins an argument which aims to show that, in various times and places, it falls to various kinds of human beings to act violently. In such cases violence is not uniformly abhorred or decried completely but it depends on the act and its reasoning. So we cannot even say that violence itself is always and forever unjustified. We can conceive of acts of legitimate violent rebellion, for example, in which we would see the reason for being violent and carrying out necessary violent acts. These acts, in fact

and in history, have not all been carried out by anarchists and, sometimes, “killing a despot was considered the highest virtue”.

Berkman’s argument transmutes into one which argues that oppression will naturally produce those who wish to strike back at the oppressor. He seems to suggest, giving the example of Russia under the Tsars, that the worst oppressors also produce the greatest number of violent reactions. Sometimes, he writes, “there [is] no way of mitigating the despotic regime [other] than by putting the fear of God into the tyrant’s heart.” Such avengers may often be “idealistic”, he concedes, but that is because they “love liberty and the people”. How else, he seems to say, may one liberate one’s people from grinding poverty, political oppression and a simple inability to live lives of their own choosing? He refers to the English suffragettes as women who “frequently resorted to [violence] to propagate and carry out their demands for equal rights” and to the killer of Franz Ferdinand, the act that instigated World War 1, as another who used violence – yet without any of these cases being cases of anarchist violence for none of these people, and myriad others, were, in fact, anarchists. In such a way he demonstrates that “anarchists have no monopoly of political violence”. Indeed, “the number of such acts by anarchists is infinitesimal as compared with those committed by persons of other political persuasions.”

Berkman goes on to point out that anarchists themselves do not agree about the appropriateness, or even the use, of violence in their activities. He points out that no one would expect an anarchist of Tolstoy’s type (Tolstoy was a Christian anarchist who took most seriously Jesus’ insistence to “turn the other cheek”) to condone violence of any sort and that most egoist or individualist anarchists are similarly against violent acts. Of the rest, there are those who may justify violent acts without carrying them out personally

and others, equally non-violent, who would deal with each incident case by case or according to the circumstances of the act. Since violence can, by common agreement, also be carried out by people of multiple political persuasions, it can also not be suggested that anarchism alone inspires it - and so neither is it something to do with being an anarchist in the first place which makes one act violently. Such facts and reasonings mirror the discussions had in V4V and the positions of V and Evey respectively.

Berkman also suggests, however, and this may apply to him and to his lifelong friend and companion, Emma Goldman, as well, that "many anarchists who at one time believed in violence as a means of propaganda (i.e. when violent acts were often called "propaganda of the deed" in anarchist circles) have changed their opinion about it and do not favour such methods anymore." It may be noted here that, when Berkman had attempted to murder the businessman in 1892, Goldman had been a co-conspirator, one who was meant to say why Berkman had done what he had done after the act was completed (Berkman was meant to kill himself after the murder in order to escape punishment). By the time Berkman was publishing this book, however, he was now saying that "most anarchists today do not believe anymore in 'propaganda by deed' and do not favour acts of that nature." Clearly V was not one of them.

Berkman attempts to use this change of heart, but without consequent giving up of anarchist beliefs and values, to argue that violence was never an inherent belief of the anarchists to begin with for, if one can retain the other beliefs but give up violence, then violence was never necessary to anarchism in the first place. It was merely a tactic used by some for reasons their own. Berkman then goes on to say that "we must admit that everyone believes in violence, and practises it, however he may condemn it in others" - which is really to say that everyone allows that they may use violence from time to time -

always for reasons they think they can justify - but also reserves the right to condemn violence in others accordingly. He then returns to his refrain of government being "organised violence", refers to the violence of the church, of parents in childhood and rounds this out into a discussion of "the right to compel you" - which he calls "authority" - and "fear of punishment" - which gets turned into "duty" and "obedience". The problem then metamorphosises not into whether violence itself is or isn't right but in what circumstances people are prepared to give it a pass and call it justified and in what circumstances they are not. This, in fact, is the real issue – both in real life and in V4V.

Violence is a form of domination, an expression of power to dominate and subdue, a violation of the peace of some other. Berkman attempts to show how such things, in family, church and state, are the norm. Violence is not then the preserve of the anarchist but the constant presence of presumptive authority and its desire to dictate and dominate. "All life," he says, "has become a crazy quilt of authority, of domination and submission, of command and obedience, of coercion and subjection, of rulers and ruled, of violence and force in a thousand and one forms." We can see this fictionally in Moore's depiction of Norsefire. Yet violence, Berkman states, "is the method of ignorance, the weapon of the weak." The strong in heart and mind need no violence, he thinks, for they have the inner consciousness of a new way of behaving and relating which is based on neither exploitation nor coercion. He paints a picture of the progressive human being evolving away from any master and so any need to dominate by means of violence.

Anarchism, of course, he gives as the name of this aspiration and this vision. It is "a society without force and compulsion, where all men shall be equals; and live in freedom, peace and harmony." Consequently, we must agree with Berkman and say that anarchism has no philosophical or political attachment to violence, a conclusion Moore comes to as well in

the third part of V4V. But there have, as no one sane can deny, also been those who thought anarchist aims could be pursued by purely violent means. Yet they were wrong and the anarchist Utopia was not brought down, as if on the clouds of heaven, by such actions. Frankly, in fact, I would for myself admit, as all smart anarchists should, that anarchism cannot even be brought to pass by violent revolution, let alone by an individual act of violence. For, asked in all honesty, how can one *force* someone to accept anarchist beliefs and values or make someone live by them in day to day life simply by using guns and bombs? *The very idea is absurd.* Anarchism, a creed of peaceful order through cooperation, cannot, can never, be imposed on anyone. It is a denial of such a creed in the very attempt to impose it even if one could impose such a voluntary creed upon someone to begin with. Anarchy is self-obligation consequent upon realisation (as in the case of Evey) not violently imposed obligation. V doesn't just point a gun at Evey and say "become an anarchist or else!" - and it would be laughably stupid if he did. Anarchy, as something communicated, is about education and voluntarism. It can't be forced (like fascism can) and so violence can never be its ultimate method.

Thus violence, as a means to anarchy, must be rejected. This, for avoidance of doubt, is not to condemn any and every violent action or any circumstantial occasion in which violence might take place. Circumstances can easily be imagined in which physical resistance, or defence of those being oppressed or under active attack, may be necessary. (My French examples above often thought of their actions as "self-defence", for example.) Such action is not a violent assault unprovoked by another, however, but a defence of those who would otherwise be peaceful if left to their own, non-antagonistic, ways. Anarchism is, consequently, ultimately a peaceful ethic as a set of beliefs and practices in the same way that the anarchy that is the world goes on its way without seeking to antagonise or oppress. It is because of this that I would therefore like to (once again)

append my "Declaration of Peace" to this section of writing as an expression both of anarchist thought in the round and of the conclusions come to in V4V specifically:

A DECLARATION OF PEACE

People of the world, we are in a war. We did not choose the war, the rich did that when they decided to keep for themselves and put profit over people. But it is time for us who they oppress to build a new society from within the ruins of this old one and to rise up from within it to overcome the oppressor.

"Why must we do this?" you may ask. Because the rich will not share. Because money is put above life. Because suffering is ignored. Because peaceful settlement is refused. Because wealth is systematically extracted, the system gamed, the people cheated. Our so-called democracies have been breached, bought and sold. Now plutocrats, who defy national borders by storing their hoarded wealth in tax havens, go from country to country impoverishing whoever they can and ignoring democratic principles as they do it. They form networks of their own, rich clubs where you need a billion to get in. They strip the assets of the world with no thought for sustainability. This is not in the interests of the many, or of the earth, and neither do we wish to rely on the duplicitous PR philanthropy of those who got rich by ripping us off in the first place. Enough is enough.

And so this is our declaration of peace, our declaration to end this war. We will no longer allow the rich to subjugate the vast majority of the people of the earth. We will no longer allow the rich to divide and conquer us by race, gender, sexuality or nationality. We do not want to fight. But if you make us fight over scraps, fear for our health and worry about our futures then what choice do you leave us? We make a declaration of peace and pledge

to stop the war you, the rich, have unjustly started against us. We pledge a future of fairness, equality, togetherness, diversity and human solidarity. The world does not have to be one human being ripping off the next one. We declare peace upon this world and seek to work together to achieve it.

Join us.

I close my discussion of violence in V4V, finally, by turning to chapter nine of book one which is actually called "Violence". Here, over several panels and a few pages, Moore weaves in multiple story lines in rhetorical juxtaposition which compare and contrast forms of, and takes on, violence. We begin with Evey, traumatised to learn she has been a pawn in V's subterfuge to trap and kill Bishop Lilliman. Evey does not want to kill and, unlike V, doesn't want to accept the responsibility for what she has done. (This would be important in anarchist context, as we have seen with V in V4V and with our actually violent anarchists I discussed above, because they had ALL taken responsibility for what they did as a part of their anarchist consciousness. Perhaps this is why V mutters under his breath, "You'll see, Evey" after she runs off to her room.)

Then there is the hard cut to Derek and Rosemary Almond's lack of domestic bliss in which Derek, a Norsefire operative, violently lashes out at his wife (who seems to want sex she never gets) before polishing his gun (one of Alan Moore's less subtle references!). Here the juxtaposition of sex/love and violence I have mentioned before is in full effect. The fascist side know no love and do not physically experience it (probably because they are imagined incapable of it). All they know is coercion and violence – and the misery it produces. (Moore imagines anarchists capable of love even if sometimes using violence.)

These scenes are further intercut with images of Delia Surridge, the former medical head of the experiments conducted at Larkhill Resettlement Camp, contemplating the rose Finch gave her (found at the scene of one of V's crimes) when he came to consult her for her medical expertise at The Nose where she now works. Delia seems instinctively to know that this relates back to the inhabitant of Room V at the camp but she says nothing. At the end of the chapter, V, who has consoled Evey, accepted her desire that she will not be involved in killing anymore, and read a section of Enid Blyton's *The Magic Faraway Tree* to her which mentions "The Land of Do-As-You-Please" (which is where Moore gets this name for anarchy from), appears at Delia's house and says he has come to kill her too, something she finds a relief. This is after we have learned, in a final strand of this chapter, that V appears to have killed ALL the survivors of Larkhill who had worked there previously, indicating a clearly systematic campaign.

What do we take from this, keeping in mind all that's been said in this violence talk? I take from it that who V kills is V's business. He seems to know what he is doing and why and he seems to accept, in this chapter at least, that Evey (and presumably others) are free to have their own mind on it. That's the anarchist way. V goes about his business and he leaves others to go about theirs. There is no overarching moral context here, no rules of right and wrong. "Do What Thou Wilt." Consequences. Responsibility.

4. How does the notion of "queer" affect *V for Vendetta* and how is it involved in the story?

The first and most important thing to note in beginning to answer this question is that IT DOES AFFECT THE STORY because the story is about fascist controllers of society who put what we now call LGBTQ+ people INTO RESETTLEMENT CAMPS. This would have

been highly relevant to Alan Moore writing in the 1980s in and about UK politics (as we know it was from the historical record of his activism in this cultural area, not least as the animus of the comics anthology AARGH! – Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia – which was created in response to Clause 28, a British directive of the late 1980s which forbade the teaching of homosexuality in schools. Moore’s homosexuality-eulogising text, which treated all love as simply love, *The Mirror of Love* was a contribution to this), not least because he himself at the time was living in an “unorthodox” relationship with two women, one of whom was his then wife. (The two women would subsequently part from Moore and he would eventually marry the artist Melinda Gebbie but these are but details.) There was also the increasingly hostile attitude towards particularly gay men to contend with due to the outbreak of AIDS which, in the UK at least, was often casually (and entirely falsely) discussed publicly as a “gay plague”. Being gay in the UK in the 1980s was often to paint a target on your back (much as it is now to be trans, in fact). “Queer” is not something many visibly socially conservative members of British society are particularly open to embracing – and they can often be particularly and vitriolically hostile against it.

But, before talking once more about “queer”, let’s briefly recap how I had already described it earlier in the context of *Mad Max*. You will recall here that I discussed queer as sexuality of a particularly non-classifiable kind. This was something to do with sexuality as a matter of history, culture and sociology. Queer was about cultural meanings that come with stories attached and could be conceived of as an ethics in the sense of “ways of being in relation to others”. Queer was there a matter of construction, of processes rather than established material facts, and of the refusal of classifications, designations, explanations and understandings that were felt either unnecessary or positively and unnecessarily confining. Queer, I decided, was an “anti-identity”, an anti-universal, a

rhetoric, a “truth-effect” – and so a promoter of spontaneous and authentic diversity, alterity and ambiguity. It was something about relations with others (recognising absolutely that there are lots of others – and that they are other) and systems of power (and how to subvert and frustrate them). Queer was seen to be a strategy or attitude and apophatic, auspiciously not susceptible to being nailed down. It was about (the politics of) fluidity and autonomy of desire.

The whole story told in *V4V* can be conceived of as a story about the subversion of coercive power for the sake of autonomous desire to live in a way that is other. And it is a story which includes openly queer people as well as others who are in ways we perhaps don’t fully realise. (Some have argued that V himself is trans. I have no reason to discount this idea but do not really want to become sidetracked into what is, at best, a fan theory, and one perhaps given further false impetus by the fact that the ones who wrote the film version of *V for Vendetta* were the openly trans Wachowskis. I am not aware of anywhere Alan Moore has either confirmed or denied such speculation. It is true that V was obviously interned in Larkhill Resettlement Camp but the literary authors are not saying why and so assumedly want to leave that open to speculation. Not that it really matters factually, of course, aside from the fact that such camps exist at all and that they exist to oppress minorities.) The very notions of otherness, then, alterity, ambiguity, possible fluidity of desire, are embedded within this story at the textual-genetic level. In at least one sense V *is* queer – for he offers people the opportunity to fuck with an arbitrarily ordered and classified society that must exist according to set roles and designations. Where any fascist society only ever wants to tell one story about itself, the one story that all must adhere to, repeat and themselves be measured by, V wants to offer people the chance to tell their own story – and as many differing, divergent and distinct stories as they like. That is queer.

We may add to this thought, in overview, the relationship between V and Evey which is presented, not least on occasion on the lips of V, as one of “love”. (V gives this, for example, as a reason for putting her through his subterfuge of being imprisoned in a camp. Being asked by Evey why he has done it, he replies: “Because I love you. Because I want to set you free.”) This is in stark contrast to how the relationships on the Norsefire side of the fence are presented. They are loveless and know nothing, for example, of physical love, something which is found to be frustrating and alienating. There is no suggestion here, however, that the relationship between V and Evey is sexual. As already remarked, V seems characterised as uninterested in sex – again for reasons undisclosed. There is a section of the book where Evey notices this and asks why he hasn’t asked to have sex with her (recalling she is introduced as touting for sex) and perhaps assumes he is a gay man. He may well be but, in a formal sense, this is just another aporia in the text. We just don’t know. But we do know that V conceives of the relationship as one of “love” and so, we may suggest, as one of desire. Love is not just a background reality people may tap into. It is a positive desire. So, where it exists, it is, in some sense, *positively desired*. V then wants to “love” Evey and we may speculate that this is an aspect of his wider mission too since it both motivates his often quite extreme actions and appears to be something he wants to inculcate in others, to share. Love, however he imagines this, is then part of his ethics and his politics and queer comes close to anarchy. (Bringing physical love, ethics and politics together and presenting them as a way of life is essentially my desire in my previous book about anarchy, *Black Dog*.)

The end of the second part of the book, “This Vicious Cabaret”, seems to me to be crucial to understanding the queer ethics and mentality (which is to do with an autonomy of love and desire) that, it seems to me, undergirds this book. Here V has snatched Evey (whom he had previously abandoned) in the street as she was about to kill her lover’s killer. He

has then returned her to The Shadow Gallery without her knowledge and pretended to imprison her in a mock up of a prison camp where he has engaged in a performance designed to convince Evey she is to be sentenced to death for previously associating with, and working for, V and for the attempted murder. Evey is convinced and she finds herself in a cell when she notices a piece of toilet paper with writing on it has been shoved through a hole in the wall. It is a note, to be assumed to have been written by the person in the next cell, someone who turns out to be called Valerie. Valerie, we learn, is a lesbian, a lesbian betrayed by her own previous lesbian lover Ruth under torture by Norsefire, having been captured, which has resulted in her seemingly being in the camp too. Valerie says that she loves the person reading her note although she does not even know who that is. The note then precedes to give a brief autobiography of Valerie as perhaps her only chance to ever write such a thing and pass it on to someone who might hear her.

Valerie's tale is a story of people telling the youthful her that her same sex love is a phase, something to be naturally grown out of (in an echo of arguments anti-trans agitators make of trans youth in our own time), of her parents not being able to accept her as openly queer, and of a fascist society which openly persecutes her for who she chooses to love. In the latter case, love is once more openly contrasted with violence and Valerie tells her story of being imprisoned, tortured and abused as images of similar happening to Evey in her mock prison are shown in the panels of the comic. Valerie's story, it turns out, is one about the authenticity and integrity of her love, her autonomous desire, and her will to retain it regardless of outcome. They can take everything from her, Valerie suggests in her speech, but they cannot take that one last "inch":

"An inch. Its small and its fragile and its the only thing in the world that's worth having. We must never lose it, or sell it, or give it away. We must never let them take it from us. I don't

know who you are, or whether you are a man or a woman. I may never see you. I will never hug you or cry with you or get drunk with you. But I love you... I wish I could kiss you. Valerie."

This speaks to me of the absolute autonomy of desire and of an ethical system of value in which this is put above all external coercions, all arbitrary designations and forced forms of relating, regardless of how physically intimidating or life-threatening they become. It is a self-actualising realisation that one determines one's feelings, one's desires, one's relations and one's course for oneself. In this sense I would say that "queer" isn't something you are (it is apophatic, how could it be?) but queer is something you can choose to become rhetorically/performatively. And Valerie – as thereafter, emboldened and self-actualised by her words, Evey chooses to become too – is one that chose this, not merely as some imagined "human nature" but as a deliberate rhetorical/performative articulation of herself and her relationships to others. ("Self" is always a matter of a rhetorical/performative relation to others.) Evey has been subjected to tortures and presented with confessions to sign whilst all this has been going on. But reading Valerie's words, learning something of her history and mentality, has brought her to her own integrity too. She will no longer accept the scripts and plans of others: now she determines her own course, follows her own chosen authenticity and autonomy. She refuses to confess – which is to refuse to be ordered and classified by fascist authority, to insist on diversity and to require integrity. She thinks she is about to be killed for this but then V relents for Evey has seemingly reached the point she needed to reach: the point of queer integrity, the point of self-determining and self-actualising clarity.

It turns out Valerie's letter was real. She, too, was interned in Larkhill and the person who originally received her impromptu autobiography was V himself. Now he has used that

letter inscribed with queer authenticity which so affected him to inspire Evey as well. One queer story of integrity in the face of a life of disdain and persecution by viciously imposed “normality” leads to anarchy unleashed and V leaving roses in memory of Valerie with those he murders. The power of love, queer love, in the face of terrible and loveless violence. The chapter “Values”, the thirteenth of part two, is here crucial in interpreting this. V speaks of love and freedom and prisons and what it will take to escape them. In a sense, this can be read as a sort of queer catechism. In V’s queer consciousness society is a naturalised prison from which one needs to intellectually, ethically and politically diverge in an act of both refusal and escape. This will involve becoming conscious of it by a disjunctive change in one’s own consciousness. Evey is urged by V, after her release from her mock internment, to “become transfixed, become transfigured.”

The Transfiguration of Jesus in the gospels (for example, at the beginning of Mark 9) is a disjunctive event in which imagined normal reality is interrupted (and completely recontextualised) by a moment in which Jesus himself appears (literally) in a new light. In the context of that light, things cannot be seen the same again for now a more authentic truth has broken in upon the customary and naturalised world. It is the same here. Evey’s experiences at the hands of V, her acquaintance with the lesbian Valerie (who may be the most important character in the whole story) through her note and now V’s explanation of how life is a prison we are normalised and conditioned to accept as “just life”, have given birth to a new consciousness, a queer consciousness as I am describing this, for it is a consciousness that means attack, a consciousness that is other and sees human relations in terms of power and determines to subvert systemic and dominating power. Evey’s “transfiguration” will not simply be a moment in a void of time. It will give birth to a new Evey, a queer Evey, an Evey who sees difference and diversity and otherness as things

with their own integrity, their own freedom, their own authenticity. An Evey who would die for them.

V knows all this because, as we see in the book, this had happened to him before when he broke out of Larkhill. It was becoming queer in an intellectual, attitudinal sense (all because of Valerie) that, using another vocabulary, we would call his becoming anarchist. I think, in this sense, these two can be seen as, and become, somewhat synonymous. They are at least fellow travellers down a road which opposes arbitrary or fixed power relations and that refuses to be classified by societies or official others, refusing to surrender its “last inch” to them. One here thinks again of Eric Finch on his own visit to the now abandoned Larkhill, on drugs and attempting to get inside the mind of V: “Who’s controlling and constraining my life... except me?” At that point Finch himself experiences a terminal change in his own consciousness, one consequent on realising the self-determination and self-actualisation of life itself. The narratives society constructs, and the power relations it instantiates and maintains, are not “reality”. They are *an imposition upon* reality. Reality is just everything that is happening, happening. There is no given, natural, obligated way to understand it. Anyone who says there is is a liar, and possibly a dangerously coercive liar. Queer consciousness is then revelling in the ambiguity and fluidity and personal integrity this realisation makes possible and which, according to V, we all need to have.

Notable here is that in his campaign after this V counters the coercion of Norsefire with the queer love of anarchy. It plays on and uses this queered notion of reality as, for example, in one of the “various valentines” V begins sending: “Roses are red, Violets are blue, Everything’s possible, Nothing is true.” As I see this, queer is at the heart of the mentality that V is now trying to communicate as he implores people to “love your rage,

not your cage". Queer is here not merely a different conception of your sexuality than that which is one of the allowed choices, an unauthorised taboo, but seeing reality as other, multiplicitous, diverse, plastic to fiction's touch, as a matter of narratives and their power relations, in total. It is about countering violent, loveless imposition of "reality" with love and autonomy of desire. Here we might example this not in the words of V but in the words of Evey now become V after V's demise on the first page of the doubly relevant (in the context of this section of my own book) chapter eleven of part three of V4V, titled "Valhalla" (ironically also a place Immortan Joe promises his obedient and self-sacrificial War Boys they will go). Here, preparing V for his requested "Viking funeral", Evey says:

"'Give me a Viking funeral,' you said. That isn't much. That isn't much to ask. Not after all you did. You came out of an abattoir unharmed, but not unchanged. And saw freedom's necessity: not just for you, but for us all. You saw and, seeing, dared to do. How purposeful was your vendetta; how benign, almost like surgery. Your foes assumed you sought revenge upon their flesh alone, but you did not stop there... you gored their ideology as well. The people stand within the ruins of society, a jail invented to outlive them all. The door is open. They can leave or fall instead to squabbling and thence new slaveries. The choice is theirs, as ever it must be. I will not lead them, but I will help them build, help them create where I'll not help them kill. The age of killers is no more. They have no place within our better world. 'Give me a Viking funeral,' you said. It's yours, my love. It's yours."

Here queer, now also a matter of love relations from Evey to V as it formerly was from V to Evey, means precisely "attack"; but attack not simply material reality – flesh, buildings, power structures: attack, not least of all, ideology, ideas, the intellectual ties that bind and cages that imprison. ("Valhalla", of course, was precisely such a prison – if presented

as a type of heaven – for the War Boys.) But queer means not simply attack; it also means giving people their integrity back, their alterity back, their diversity back: it means making them aware that the prison was not the only reality in which they might exist. V's queerness has exposed them to the rhetoricity of their existences, the performativity of reality itself. (Performativity seems to run all through this story and is a significant part of V's own characterisation, not least in the set piece explosions, etc. It is as if Moore is pointing out that one becomes a thing by acting, living and being inhabited by the thing. All the world is a stage in a Land of Do-As-You-Please... and that too is queer.) They can continue to live as caged prisoners in someone's forced imposition of a world or pick up the reigns of their own lives and their own integrities and guide them where they may. An autonomy of desire in a fluid, rhetorical reality or the narrative and material imposition of an incarcerating world of forced relations: these are the options given in *V for Vendetta*.

The ~~Four~~ Five Queers of the Apocalypse

*"Last came Anarchy: he rode
On a white horse, splashed with blood;
He was pale even to the lips,
Like Death in the Apocalypse."*

(8th stanza of Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Masque of Anarchy")

*Now take me dancing at the disco
Where you buy your Winnebago
I wanna ride on a white horse
I want to ride on a white horse*

*When the light turns into darkness
Will he turn up to explain us?
I wanna ride on a white horse
I want to ride on a white horse*

*Lend me a whole new world
All night, feel life, oh, oh
When is there ever sense
To love this world? Oh, oh*

*In the whirlpool, we'll go deeper
In this world that's getting cheaper
I wanna ride on a white horse
I want to ride on a white horse*

*I like dancing at the disco
I want blisters, you're my leader
I wanna ride on a white horse
I want to ride on a white horse*

*Lend me a whole new world
All night, feel life, oh, oh
When is there ever sense
To love this world? Oh, oh*

Oh, I love this feeling

Feels like forever

Oh, I love this feeling

Feels like real leather

(Goldfrapp, "Ride A White Horse")

"Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, "Come!" I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer. When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature call out, "Come!" And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.

When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, "Come!" I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand, and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!"

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, "Come!" I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed with him; they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth."

(Revelation 6:1-8)

Scrotus: What was that?

History Man: That is the darkest of angels. The fifth Rider of the Apocalypse.

(Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga)

Anarchy and Apocalypse are not only brought together in *Mad Max* and *V for Vendetta*. In Percy Bysshe Shelley's famous poem "The Masque of Anarchy" Anarchy rides a white horse and looks like Death. It symbolises the King and privileged royal power which, at Peterloo in 1819, which is what the poem is about, disgraced itself by attacking working people seeking rights. "Anarchy" is there used negatively and not in the sense I would use it at all. In Goldfrapp's "Ride A White Horse" the aforementioned animal reappears but now signifies a night of euphoric enjoyment and to be on the white horse is its symbol. Next comes the actual Apocalypse where we see the first Rider of the Apocalypse is on the white horse. This is no king. Rather, it is military conquest, a more consequential and thoroughgoing version of the power referred to by Shelley in his poem. The riders in this apocalypse (released upon the opening of seals by "the lamb" – that is, a symbolisation of the 'real' king in this apocalypse, Jesus Christ, the Son of God) are conquest, slaughter, greed and death. George Miller in *Furiosa* (rather cornily, I thought) gives us a fifth Rider – Furiosa herself, "the darkest of angels". Whether this makes any sense or not, and whether the film's presentation of her earns her this description or not, Miller is wanting to utilise apocalyptic imagery in Furiosa's depiction. There is a sense of the unstoppable and the furious about her, she is someone consequential, someone who ends things.

In this queer apocalypse of mine, however, things are different. There is still conflict. There is still rage. There is still something, and someone, to fight. It will be consequential. It will be "epic" (Dementus). But we will be fighting with queer weapons of war, weapons

of love, weapons of desire, but weapons nevertheless. We would prefer not to have to fight but if people want to keep us all our lives in cages then what the fuck are we supposed to do? And so I turn to The Five Queers of the Apocalypse.

The FIRST Queer of the Apocalypse is Judith Butler in her book *Who's Afraid of Gender?*. This is Butler's recent, not quite so technical, book in which she casts her eye across the recent culture war in regard to trans people and "gender" – and particularly in regard to those who are (in her term) "anti-gender ideology". We are here talking about conservative and Catholic Christians (people who would seemingly welcome "the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" as they might imagine them forerunners of something they want), conservative and (white) supremacist political types, the patriarchal and those who (knowingly or not) uphold patriarchy, certain kinds of (middle class, white) feminist who have an exclusionary mindset, etc. What all these people have in common is an authoritarian mentality: they want to rule, lay down the law, constrain and control, be coercive and eradicate. As Butler describes these sorts of people, they seem to want their own Apocalypse, one which takes us back to a time not before Rome came (the historical setting of the New Testament's Apocalypse) but before gender came:

"The weaponization of this fearsome phantasm of 'gender' is authoritarian at its core. Rolling back progressive legislation is surely fueled by backlash, but backlash describes only the reactive moment in this scene. The project of restoring the world to a time before 'gender' promises a return to a patriarchal dream-order that may never have existed but that occupies the place of 'history' or 'nature'—an order that only a strong state can restore. The shoring up of state powers, including the powers of the courts, implicates the anti-gender movement in a broader authoritarian project. The targeting of sexual and gender minorities as dangers to society, as exemplifying the most destructive force in the

world, in order to strip them of their fundamental rights, protections, and freedoms, implicates the anti-gender ideology in fascism. As panic builds, full license is given to the state to negate the lives of those who have come to represent, through the syntax of the phantasm, a threat to the nation."

In those who are "anti-gender", then, we have our Immortan Joe or our Norsefire.

Butler, throughout her book, takes the view that "anti-gender ideology" is never a singular, one issue thing. It is part of a wider project of political and societal control. Those who engage "gender" as a "phantasm" (Butler's chosen description of gender in the phantasmatic conception of its self-chosen enemies) don't just want to control (and/or eradicate) those who talk about or perform various genders in public, they want to direct and control a whole bunch of associated others too. Their culturally and societally controlling politics is conceived of as more totalizing than just a single issue. So it is also about "eradicating reproductive justice", "the rights of women", "the rights of trans and non-binary people", "gay and lesbian freedoms" and "all efforts to achieve gender and sexual equality and justice" besides "the censorship targeting open public discourse and the academy". (As I write this one – I assume publicly-funded – Florida college has recently quite publicly put its whole gay and lesbian library collection in a large truck to be taken away and dumped. Students were not even allowed to sort out books they wanted in order to buy them for themselves with their own money. They were simply and compulsorily disappeared. To read more about such agendas just download a copy of Project 2025 which now seems to be the guidebook for US government.)

Butler, as I have said, describes the mentality that drives such behaviour as a "phantasm" which suggests a delusive fantasy but one which holds the one possessed by it in fear (as

in the famous 1979 horror picture *Phantasm* itself, a film about childhood fears of death that blurs the lines between waking and dreaming, reality and fantasy). Butler understands “phantasm” herself in the psychoanalytic terms of the late French psychoanalyst, Jean Laplanche, for whom such a thing is more than a matter of subjective imagination but also involves “a syntactical arrangement of elements of psychic life”. The point here seems to be that those who are transfixed by the phantasm of gender they have created (or become possessed by) in their own heads have engaged in “an organization of desire and anxiety” which leads them to fear the literal collapse of their world at the hands of “gender” – a gender apocalypse. Thus: “The phantasmatic scene is not the same as a fantasy that you or I happen to have in a moment of distraction. It is, rather, a way of organizing the world wrought by the fear of a destruction for which gender is held responsible.” Thus, when some such people of Christian persuasion talk about either trans or gay as “from Satan” you could say that, in their terms, they are utterly serious about this, held in the sway of their phantasm as they are. They are understanding themselves, others and the whole world of their experience in phantasmatic yet also ideological terms. This not only provides them with a sense (of sorts!) and a logic, but it brings them (and others) into being as social subjects. They construct a world in which they are under attack by “gender”.

One way to put this might be that such people have become victims of their own delusions. The problem with this is that other people easily become victims of their delusions too – because they are openly and specifically controlling, coercive delusions that are meant to have material political effects (see Project 2025 again). We saw this in the cases of both *Mad Max* and *V for Vendetta* before as well. Butler reminds us that:

"anti-gender ideology is driven by a stronger wish, namely, the restoration of a patriarchal dream-order where a father is a father; a sexed identity never changes; women, conceived as 'born female at birth,' resume their natural and 'moral' positions within the household; and white people hold uncontested racial supremacy."

This, she says, is "a fantasy that will reinstate order grounded in patriarchal authority" and this itself is "part of [a] larger restoration project that seeks to shore up authoritarian regimes as rightful forms of paternalism." Butler, in her queer analysis, is quite clear that "[this] dream works only as a phantasmatic organization of reality". One, in fact, might simply use other language to describe this, the language of apocalypse, and say that the anti-gender people dream of an eradication of "gender" in order that we may usher in a new heaven and a new earth, one blissfully free of gender, one achieved by violence and nothing to do with love. In this new heaven and new earth a patriarchal authority rules, women (and not-men) are either subservient or completely eradicated and everything is set on a fixed and unchangeable course for all eternity, watched over and maintained by permanent authority. For some this will be theocratic as well but, at the least, it will be patriarchal and authoritarian. There will be no freedom of love and no autonomy of desire. It is, in a very real sense, the vision of a destructive (if imagined righteous) apocalypse that remakes the world in its own phantasmatic image.

Such people, as Butler goes into in her introduction, are afraid of the open mind, the mind that thinks (for itself!), the mind that does not submit to, or think in terms of, dogma. Thus, they imagine things like "gender" or "critical race theory" or "queer theory" to be the dogmas that they are not. Having their own dogmas, and being dogmatic people who think dogmatically, they assume everyone else either is or must be too. This is why they always talk about gender as an "ideology" when no one who is actively trans, or who

teaches or studies gender, remotely understands what they are talking about. How is gender a dogma in such terms? What are the canons of this dogma? How is the dogma policed and by whom? How can something that is actually about autonomy and agency and self-expression even be regarded dogmatically? Butler replies that “the anti-gender movement is a politically consequential form of anti-intellectualism, opposing thought itself as a danger to society—fertile soil for the horrid collaboration of fascist passions with authoritarian regimes.”

The example of “fascist passions with authoritarian regimes” I want to focus on from Butler’s book is the Catholic Church with which she begins her analysis. In her telling, “The idea of a dangerous gender ideology emerged in the 1990s when the Roman Catholic Council for the Family warned that ‘gender’ was a threat to the family and to biblical authority.” About twenty years later it had risen, in the rhetoric of the Pope himself, to the heights of being “a demonic force of annihilation pitted against God’s creative powers” (Butler’s gloss). Readers might divine there a reference to trans-related surgeries which, in the minds of those possessed by Catholic phantasmatic dogma, usurp the place (and so the authority) of God in their “remaking” of the body. (Is it worth pointing out here that opponents of trans people in general never seem sure whether such surgeries are changing anything or changing nothing? Bizarre.) Such people tell us what, in their fantastical, biblically-infused, imaginations, God set in place as an authority uniquely (in their dogma) placed to do so and who can brook no alternative visions. (We might, sarcastically, here be moved to ask why such a God does not himself seem remotely so animated by these things as his cheerleaders on earth. I mean, he allows them and, in the minds of some Christian trans and queer people, even creates them himself!) Are we here meant to believe that God created a man from dirt and then a woman from the man’s rib as the fable-ridden book of Genesis would have us believe? Are we meant to accept these

as foundational, uncontradictable acts? It seems, from Butler's evidence, that the Catholics fear that "gender" is cutting in on God's turf.

Butler explains this further in the following passage:

"a trans person can claim that their gendered truth is internal, even God-given, while another may regard themselves as formed by culture or even freely chosen. All of them deserve the right to live freely, which means that their demand for political freedom does not necessarily presuppose that gender or sexuality is chosen. When people claim a gender or, indeed, a sex for themselves that was not the one originally assigned at birth, they exercise human powers of self-definition at the expense of a natural sex divinely created or established in a Christian version of nature. According to the Pope, they are acting as if they have divine powers, flagrantly disputing the power of divinity to establish their sex for all time. At some moments, the Pope has declared that gender advocates seek to steal the powers of God, thus confirming that they work from the devil. For the devil always disguises himself in a mesmerizing appearance. If gender is such a devil, or the devil himself, then to argue with him is to fall inside his trap. To argue with the devil would be to accept the false appearance as a plausible interlocutor. Devils and demons can only be expelled or banished, burned in effigy, which is why censorship, bullying, and pathologization become the key strategies for the anti-gender movement."

A key point to note in such argumentation (common to others who are not necessarily Catholic, or even Christian, but for differing reasons) is that voluntarism or "self-id" in the matter of gender (what we might otherwise call freedom or autonomy or agency) are social evils. They are examples of things people should *not* have. Some Catholic apologists, according to Butler, have argued that such things are against both the ancient

dogma of religion but also the modern dogma of science (here in such argumentation working hand in hand for a change). Apparently, forms of liberty can be imagined which are just too radical (or is it that, like Furiosa's breach of Immortan Joe's boundaries or V's attempts to incapacitate Norsefire, such liberties seek to evade specific sorts of authoritarian control?). By such means, we come to the micromanaged control of children as those who should be "left alone" – something that the dogmatic themselves are determined NEVER to do.

This is broached as a matter of a child's "freedom" (from the imagined destructive snares of homosexual or queer or trans "ideology") but it should be self-evidently obvious that this is no freedom at all if what is really being argued for is an open field for paternalistic and patriarchal domination in regard to theologically mandated and justified dogmas that literally exist to remove freedoms of intellectual, moral and desiring kinds from these self-same children. Such dogmatists, whether Catholic or not, always see learning or education as indoctrination – *but only because learning and education for them are exactly indoctrinating practices*. Their every accusation is an admission. What they fear is that alternative visions, new apocalypses, might threaten the hegemony of their own, based on "the natural family" (which isn't "natural" or even necessary at all and isn't even really all that historic – but that's another story) which, in their story, also secures the nation (literally a Nazi dogma). This both invalidates anything "queer" and also embeds women as a class within patriarchal family formations. This is not just the belief of Catholics but is evident in the dogmas of people from Meloni to Orban to Bolsonaro to Trump who use political rhetoric and incitations to create discursive formations "with the power to regulate life and death, distinguishing citizenship and criminality".

The last two Popes have both been anti-gender Popes. This is for dogmatic reasons and for reasons of the perceived threat to the authority of their own beliefs as things which shape the world politically (even if based on theological fictions). The former of these two, Joseph Ratzinger, who was a member of the Hitler Youth and served in the German forces during the Second World War (although later biographical accounts try to stress Ratzinger was anything but a convinced Nazi), has a good claim to be one of the first conservatives who became agitated about gender and started causing a fuss about it due to his prominent role in Catholic doctrine and the institutions which concern themselves with such a thing. Ratzinger saw danger in people being free “to constitute themselves as they like” and in the equation of homosexuality with heterosexuality and regarded such ideas as a threat to both a Catholic-inspired theory of the human being and to “the natural family” on which Catholic dogma is based.

Butler argues that Ratzinger saw such ideas as “a wayward or excessive exercise of liberty” in an argument which simply ends up being the belief that gender is a human attempt to emancipate itself from a creational authority established by God. (Here I think Ratzinger is right. Queer and trans both mean emancipating oneself not only from gods as authorities but from the authority of the god-idea itself – and any who would claim it.) Dogmatists like Ratzinger set “male and female” in stone, give it the presumed authority of God as a creational and definitive fact, and define the human by such a polarity. Anything else they conceive of as a possibly anarchic (in the bad sense) liberty, a surfeit of chaotic freedom and as the subversive undermining of the pillars of family and heterosexual partnership. For such people male and female must be definitive and distinctive things, deliberately set apart, defined and institutionalised. “Gender” they then see as something phantasmatically destructive to this pure vision, a threat to the world as they have fictionally constructed it. For the Catholic this is all defined in the doctrine of

“complementarity”, the belief that “the human is defined by man and woman, that God created that division, but also that marriage must be restricted to heterosexuals.”

Pope Francis followed on where Pope Benedict (Ratzinger) left off, specifically emphasising complementarity. He takes issue, consequently, with both the phenomenon of trans existence but also with queer kinship which expressly denies to “the natural family” the right to decide what a family even is or should be. In his rhetoric Francis argues that such things annihilate “nature”. For example, Butler quotes the following Papal commentary:

“We must not fall into the trap of being limited by ideological concepts. The family is an anthropological fact, and consequently a social, cultural fact, etc. We cannot qualify it with ideological concepts which are compelling at only one moment in history, and then decline. Today there can be no talk of the conservative family or the progressive family: family is family! Do not allow yourselves to be qualified by this, or by other ideological concepts. The family has a force of its own.”

Here Francis calls “the family” “an anthropological fact”. It isn’t AND NEVER WAS such a fact. If, for example, Pope Francis had read Ryan and Jetha’s book *Sex At Dawn* he would find an explicit, anthropologically based, refutation of exactly the idea that “the natural family” is either natural or necessary in the history of the cultures of the world. The “ideological concept” here is not ideas about personal freedom or family relations which are trans or queer but the idea that there is such a thing as “natural personhood” or “the natural family” at all. So, as Butler commentates on this passage herself:

"The effort to quash any qualifications on family serves the purpose of keeping family in a single, acceptable form. Any effort to reconfigure the family or move toward ideas of kinship arrangements not identified as family is ruled out as 'ideological.' But the practice of ruling out alternate possibilities of kinship when they already exist is surely an ideological move! How else to establish a single social form as universal and necessary? The way to make the argument is simply to assert the self-identity of family, a tautological move that seeks to rule out all cultural and historical variation. 'Family is family!' seeks to assert the obvious, but it is a way of shutting down alternative possibilities already actualized in the world."

In short, this is the argument of a man, and a dogmatic organisation, determined to spout its dogma with its eyes purposefully closed and with its fingers in its ears, deliberately blind and deaf to the reality going on in the world around it. "Family is family" is a nonsense tautology and the attempt to perpetrate the idea of "the natural" off the back of obvious historical dogmas that appear and function in particular times and circumstances alone is desperate and pathetic. All this then does, as seen in and through the various missives various Catholic bodies have been pumping out for twenty or thirty years now, is literally demonise "gender" or "trans" or "queer" as things which "annihilate the concept of nature" as one document Butler quotes says. But no one is doing that. Rather, they might very well be suggesting that these things are part of *the very same nature* – but one that is not phantasmatically shrunk until it achieves a required minimalistic and doctrinally determined lack of diversity.

That this is doctrinal and dogmatic is, of course, all part of the social and political power relations striven for in and through such arguments. What we are dealing with here is (as correctly diagnosed by the Catholics Butler considers) a form of liberty versus a form of

authoritarianism. Catholics, like seemingly all conservatives, people of coercion and control as they are, assume that they are in a race to control as many people as they can so they see having influence over people (however achieved) as vital. Thus, in what is a regular tactic, they try to manoeuvre themselves politically into a position where they are the only ones allowed to use their authority to indoctrinate or otherwise control people. hilariously (at least if one is already completely infected by Elon Musk's "Woke Mind Virus"), Butler reports that the Vatican's strategy for debunking "gender" has been to argue that it itself is a dogma, a dictatorship, and that it itself wants to arbitrate "authoritative truth" to the exclusion of all others. And so it conjures a spectre of "gender authoritarianism" with which to frighten its dogmatised adherents and then puts itself up as the good, honest and true authority which can counter this advertised pernicious force. The Catholics, only being able to conceive of things hierarchically as a matter of who is in control giving the orders and who is not and is doing as they are told, simply conceives of its rhetorical enemy as more of the same but according to different values.

Thus, it both misunderstands its enemy in terms of what it is but also in terms of what it wants and is about. It fears "absolute autonomy", "liquidity" and "fluidity" but it neither understands nor interrogates them in exploratory ways. It simply sees them as totems, alternative authorities, which threaten its own narrow, controlling and coercive authoritarianism. And it is much the same with all the other anti-gender authoritarians whether Christian religionists, white supremacists, incels and paternalists or confused feminists pathetically clinging on to tiny fiefdoms they want to be able to control themselves to the detriment of all others. Control is the only real interest for any of these people and a controlling, coercive model of society and its relations is all their phantasmatic minds can conjure up. They are Immortan Joe. They are Norsefire. They are every authoritarian you ever heard of or read about.

But what, then, is to be done? What is Butler's queer prescription?

"The task is to help produce a world in which we can move and breathe and love without fear of violence, with the radical and unrealistic hope in a world no longer driven by moral sadism cloaked as morality. The response, in other words, should produce a compelling ethical and political vision that exposes and opposes the cruelty and destruction in circulation. The phantasm of gender as a destructive force becomes the quasi-moral alibi for unleashing destruction against all those who seek to live and breathe in freedom. Taking a stand against the anti-gender movement is done in the name of breathing and living free from the fear of violence. It is the beginning of the ethical vision we now require.

To oppose the anti-gender ideology movement, we require transnational coalitions that gather and mobilize all those it has targeted. The internecine fights within the field must become dynamic and productive conversations and confrontations, however difficult, within an expansive movement dedicated to equality and justice, to preserving and affirming freedoms and powers without which life is unlivable, and politics are unjust. Coalitions are never easy. They involve antagonistic encounters and can be destroyed by internecine cruelties. And where conflicts cannot be resolved, movements can still move ahead together with an eye focused on the common sources of oppression. Coalitions do not require mutual love; they require only a shared insight that oppressive forces can be defeated by acting together and moving forward with difficult differences without insisting on their ultimate resolution."

Perhaps the fictive realisation of such a coalition could be the image of Furiosa, Max, Nux, the now renegade ex-wives and the surviving Vuvalini taking on the army of Immortan Joe and that patriarch himself? Their interests, back stories, motivations and directions

were surely not all the same. But a world in which Immortan Joe existed was a world that threatened (and incarcerated) them all. There is no sense in which this fictional coalition, once made, required any unbreakable commitments. It was not set in stone. It was in the moment and of its time and for the specific reasons of achieving mutually necessary goals. It was because there was a common enemy. But do we have such enemies?

"when the way of life that is reproduced destroys all ways of life, including its own, one has to ask how the pursuit of destruction is carried out by practices that are considered to be the way things just are, or have to be. Climate destruction is the most terrifying example. It teaches us, however, not only that many now live with a fear of destruction that their way of life has helped to produce. It teaches us also that many have no idea how to live with that fear of destruction, which is a fear not only about the future in which events can happen at all but also about what is happening now, and what has been happening for some time. We look, we look away; we know, we fail to know. We live in the anxiety produced by knowing that we are not knowing what we secretly should and do know.

And what about war, like the actual one waged against Ukraine: Do those of us who live outside that region know that destruction? What does it mean not to know it, even to know that it is unfathomable, exceeding the reach of knowledge? Or the decimation of peoples in the Amazon who are dying and predicted to die off, by virtue of corporate extractivism? And what about this pandemic still churning along at reduced rates, and the ones to come, which have so many people living with a sense of ambient death that they know neither how to mark nor how to mourn? And consider neoliberalism and the decimation of social and public services, the increasingly precarious character of work, the withdrawal of health care, retirement, rights to be protected against eviction: all of this underscores the increasing dispensability of lives, their induced precarity. At this writing, over eighty million

people globally are forcibly displaced from their homes, and approximately one in eight live in slums. The devastations of capitalism would take many books to catalog, and yet the sense of destruction, the destruction of what is most valuable, is with us all the time, either as an accomplished reality, an ongoing process, or a terrifying prospect. Many of us live with this sense that our lives, too, are dispensable, or could become so at a moment's notice or eventually, that we could find, or already have found, ourselves with unpayable debts, bound to banks for life, securing their profits without being able to afford shelter. And what about all of us who do not know whether the future will provide affordable or accessible health care or any prospect of stable work that would secure the conditions of life for ourselves and those with whom we are interdependent?

Maybe all this seems far from gender. But when gender is figured as a threat to humanity, civilization, 'man,' and nature, when gender is likened to a nuclear catastrophe, the Ebola virus, or full-blown demonic power, then it is this escalating fear of destruction to which political actors appeal. They see the escalating fear and know that they can make use of it for their own purposes, so they escalate it even more. There is the ready and continuous fear of destruction, the source of which is difficult to name, which is solicited and spiked to fortify both religious authorities and state powers—or their strengthening alliance, as we see in Putin's Russia, the Republican Party in the United States, and various countries in Eastern Europe, East Asia, and Africa. The displacement of this fear of destruction from its identifiable conditions of production—climate disaster, systemic racism, capitalism, carceral powers, extractivism, patriarchal social and state forms—results in the production of 'cultural' figures or phantasms invested with the power to destroy the earth and the fundamental structures of human societies. Precisely because that destruction is happening without its sources being named and checked, the fear and anxiety congeal without a proper vocabulary or analysis, and 'gender' and 'critical race theory' are produced and

targeted as the causes of destruction. Gender is not just a matter of individual identity, but a category that describes the division of labor, the organization of states, the unequal distribution of power. Gender has never been 'merely cultural' but has been cast that way by opponents who want to regard gender as a secondary concern or those who believe that cultural pathologies are responsible for social worlds breaking apart. Once identified as a cause of destruction, gender itself must be destroyed, and what follows is censorship, the de-departmentalization of gender studies and women's studies, the stripping of rights of health care, increased pathologization, restricting spaces for public gathering, the repeal or rejection of laws that protect against discrimination, and the passing of laws that segregate, silence, and criminalize those who are trying to live their lives without fear. All those laws say: No, you will live your lives with fear, or perhaps you will not even count as a life at all.

Let us remember that the killing of women and trans, queer, bisexual, and intersex people is an actual form of destruction taking place in the world. The killing of Black women, the killing of Black queer and trans people, the killing of migrants, including queer and trans migrants—all these are destructive acts. As the numbers increase, it becomes increasingly apparent whose lives are considered dispensable, and whose lives are not. The inequality of the grievable makes itself known. Once gender, in its phantasmatic and abbreviated form, comes to include abortion rights, access to reproductive technology, sexual and gender health services, rights for trans people of any age, women's freedom and equality, queers of color's freedom struggles, single parenting, gay parenting, new kinship outside of heteronormative models, adoption rights, sex reassignment, gender-confirming surgery, sex education, books for young people, books for adults, and images of nudity, then it represents a wide range of political struggles that its opponents seek to shut down in their effort to restore a patriarchal order for the state, religion, and the family, an

authoritarianism for the present. The only way forward is for all those targeted to gather themselves more effectively than their enemies have, to recognize their alliance, and to fight the phantasms prepared for them with a powerful and regenerative imaginary that can distinguish between the destruction of life and a collective life-affirmation defined by struggle and even irresolution...

... Consider the operative fantasies about migrants elaborated in support for xenophobic and racist migration policy, or the operative fantasies about women as child murderers in the anti-abortion rhetoric, or those that figure trans women as cis rapists infiltrating bathrooms. In each of these instances, we are encountering phenomena that are at once social and psychological. When fear runs through a targeted population, when hatred is stoked against a concept or idea such as 'gender' that is said to wield the power of total destruction, then the tools we need to understand, deflate, and oppose such a movement are drawn from media with the power to occupy and deflate the phantasm in the service of another way of imagining, the one required to build vibrant and transnational alliance. We need this way of imagining solidarity going forward as much as we need air to breathe, for living on, and living on together, requires solidarity in the midst of breathable air, and a sense of living that includes and exceeds human life to include other living beings and processes. If something or someone seeks to take away what we need to live, we begin to fight for survival, but fighting alone never gets anyone very far. The helplessness one feels recalls the primary helplessness of the infant and the clear insight that without supportive infrastructure, no one's life is livable.

When the anti-gender movement says that gender will strip you of your sexed identity, they are trying to strip a group of people of their sexed identity. Their inversion and externalization should be read as a confession: it is rights-stripping that they are

advocating. They warn against 'recruiting' by gay and lesbian teachers or books, but they are recruiting the public into a phantasmatic scene in which they are the ones who are being stripped of a sexed identity by progressive laws. Now, one might expect that identifying with such a position might expand powers of sympathy or concern, but in this case, the rights-stripping of trans people is fully absorbed and occluded by the identification that the public is asked to feel. In other words, they are the only ones at risk of losing their sexed identity. The only way out for them is apparently to deny the rights of sex assignment to trans people. Yet trans rights to self-determination take no one else's rights away. Self-assignment is a form of freedom to live a livable life, a collective freedom that has been achieved through struggle. It is, however, twisted into a rights-stripping activity in order to justify stripping trans people of their rights. Similarly, queer families do not negate heterosexual ones. They only dispute the inevitability and superiority of the heteronormative family form...

... this heightened focus on 'gender' by the Right deflects from the various social and political forces that are, in fact, destroying the world as we know it: climate destruction, war, capitalist exploitation and social and economic inequality, intensifying precarity and economic abandonment, global slums, homelessness, detention camps, systemic forms of racism, deregulation, neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and new forms of fascism... "

I hope you can see from this queer-inflected rhetoric of Butler's that, yes, indeed we do have common enemies – and so, says Butler, we need common alliances to battle them. Not, Butler insists, as things that must last for all time but certainly as things that might make a crucial difference in a moment of common precariousness. We must oppose what Butler terms "apocalyptic fears of gender", a phantasm doing service as cover for myriad physical and material assaults on whole populations of people by dominant and coercive

others, with queer, loving alliances of our own making that are formed to challenge and battle them. We do not need to go to post-apocalyptic Australia or post-nuclear holocaust Britain to find our “Wasteland”. We are in one now. And this is it. “Build the alliances that are the one best hope for your survival,” says Butler. Survive!

The SECOND Queer of the Apocalypse is Leslie Feinberg who is one of several examples I intend to now take from the third, “Queering Gender”, part of *The Transgender Studies Reader*. I will be interacting with Feinberg, a person of constantly changing gender expression throughout their life who was assigned female at birth but, in adult life, with full beard, could, and did, easily “pass” as a man, in their pamphlet “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come” which was a precursor to their more famous book *Transgender Warriors* which I previously discussed in my book *Black Dog*. One thing to note here in Feinberg’s language is that they use “transgender” with a very wide frame of reference which seems to include any and all “gender-crossing” phenomena inside it. It is, thus, a very maximalist use of the term. Feinberg was also a person who had an acquaintance with communism and they bring class analysis to bear in their appraisal of the situation in regards to the oppression of trans people. Indeed, in their opening Feinberg calls this oppression “historic” – in that they conceive of it as having a history. What Feinberg is talking about here is “people who defy the ‘man’-made boundaries of gender. Gender: self-expression, not anatomy.” The very basis of this analysis is also fundamentally queer as in when Feinberg baldly states that “Simplistic and rigid gender codes are neither eternal nor natural. They are changing social concepts.”

Another example of this queerness is the way Feinberg describes society and her experience of it:

"even in a society where there are harsh social penalties for not fitting, a large part of the population can't or won't change their nature. It is apparent that there are many ways for women and men to be; everything in nature is a continuum. Many of the terms used to describe us are words that cut and sear. When I first worked in the factories of Buffalo as a teenager, women like me were called 'he-shes.' Although 'he-shes' in the plants were most frequently lesbians, we were recognized not by our sexual preference but by the way we expressed our gender."

Feinberg continues:

"There are other words used to express the wide range of 'gender outlaws': transvestites, transsexuals, drag queens and drag kings, cross-dressers, bull-daggers, stone butches, androgynes, diesel dykes or berdache—a European colonialist term."

Feinberg is, thus, not describing a unitary phenomenon but an associated set of people, far from all the same in either gender or sexual terms. But she describes them in terms of a "social movement" urging that "struggling shoulder to shoulder together w[ill] create a more powerful force for change" in a context in which past gay and lesbian strugglers had to come to terms with the "progressives" even as they conceive "the transgendered community" must come to terms with the gays and lesbians in their own day. The underlying political undercurrent here is that the powerful love a division and if a naturally occurring one isn't apparent then they will create one (they can exploit). It is, from the perspective of the oppressed, then a matter of diversity and solidarity:

"Many people think that all 'masculine' women are lesbians and all 'feminine' men are gay. That is a misunderstanding. Not all lesbians and gay men are 'cross'-gendered. Not all

transgendered women and men are lesbian or gay. Transgendered people are mistakenly viewed as the cusp of the lesbian and gay community. In reality the two huge communities are like circles that only partially overlap. While the oppressions within these two powerful communities are not the same, we face a common enemy. Gender-phobia—like racism, sexism and bigotry against lesbians and gay men—is meant to keep us divided. Unity can only increase our strength. Solidarity is built on understanding how and why oppression exists and who profits from it. It is our view that revolutionary changes in human society can do away with inequality, bigotry and intolerance."

A big part of Feinberg's essay (which, growing into the book *Transgender Warriors*, emphasises this all the more fully) is that "transgender people have always been here". As such, a large part of the essay is given over to cataloguing them (and their various travails as a result). Feinberg's point in this is that it is the shape of society, the construction of its relationships (which need be neither forced nor necessary) which determines who and what shall be honoured and who or what shall be despised and/or disdained. So when Feinberg says that "A glance at human history proves that when societies were not ruled by exploiting classes that rely on divide-and-conquer tactics, 'cross-gendered' youths, women and men on all continents were respected members of their communities" – a historical fact they set out to evidence – they are making the point that the modern requirement of "passing"(which others below will also comment on) is a cultural phenomenon – but one which means trans people must hide away or fit in or become invisible as part of the cis population. So it is as if society is saying that you can be trans but only so long as you don't stand out as trans for that would disrupt the rest of us. (An interesting observation in relation to Furiosa in Immortan Joe's organisation or the lesbians mentioned in V4V.) Gender, then, is social and cultural but it may make some gender expressions undesirable as part of that process and Feinberg imagines

illegitimately so: “there is a whole range of ways for women and men to express themselves” and not least in a world where “human society has undergone continuous development and change”.

Feinberg’s historical tale is then one of matrilineal societies with familial organisations far removed from the customary Western ones of today (I discuss this to some degree in *Black Dog* in the context of Matriarchal Studies) and which preceded by millennia the developments of class, private property, the nuclear family, capitalism and patriarchal authority. In this world cross-dressing, gender swaps, gender fluidity, body types as not having fixed and unchangeable gender expressions, etc., were common and uncontroversial phenomena, ones often incorporated into mystic or nature religions of a pagan (i.e. rural) sort that animated people’s imaginal worlds. This was a pagan, non-Christian (and mostly pre-Christian) world. But Christianity did arise and Feinberg sees a problem in it, not least when it stopped being a belief of the urban poor and became the state religion of Rome. Christianity from there on out spread with a seal of authoritarian approval and paganism began to be thoroughly usurped across Europe, particularly over the following millennium, due to the Roman Church. Allied to social developments such as “the rise of private property”, “the male-dominated family” and “class divisions” created by a developing economy, society became far more rigid and arbitrary than it had been in former pagan times. The Catholic Church in Europe rose to be a huge political and economic force, and a vast landowner. It required adherence to its precepts as a consequence and had the material might to make it so.

Nevertheless, any number of phenomena, which Feinberg addresses together under the umbrella description of “transgender”, managed to survive despite centuries of increasing persecution. There were, for example, still well known cross-dressers (such as

Joan of Arc and the Chevalier d'Eon) – although they did not always suffer the same fate. Feinberg also notes that, on several occasions, cross-dressers appeared as political rebels:

"In 1630, for example, the Mere Folle and 'her' troupe attacked royal tax officers in Dijon; in Beaujolais in the 1770s, male peasants put on women's clothes and attacked their landlord's surveyors; in Wiltshire in 1631, bands of peasants, led by men dressed as women who called themselves 'Lady Skimmington,' rioted against the King's enclosure of their forest lands; in April 1812, two male weavers in female clothing—'General Ludd's wives'—led a crowd in the destruction of looms and factories in Stockport; the Welsh riots of the 1830s and 1840s, against turnpike tolls and other statutory taxes, were led by 'Rebecca' and other transvestites; the Porteous riots of 1736 in Edinburgh were led by men disguised as women, and their male leader was known as 'Madge Wildfire'; in Ireland the Whiteboys, who were active in the 1760s, dressed in long white frocks 'to restore the ancient commons and redress other grievances' in the struggle against the British landlords."

Feinberg concentrates on Europe here because, quite bluntly, they blame European culture as it has developed for the current gender oppression:

"The blame for anti-transgender laws and attitudes rests squarely on the shoulders of the ruling classes on that continent [i.e. Europe]. The seizures of lands and assets of the 'accused' during the witch trials and Inquisition helped the ruling classes acquire the capital to expand their domination over Asia, Africa and the Americas. The European elite then tried to force their ideology on the peoples they colonized around the world."

This is undoubtedly true and, as elsewhere reported, to this day Western agencies and governments force their cultural requirements on colonial, or formerly colonial,

territories in return for aid of various kinds. This is further complicated by the fact that the regimes in these places might now have come to accept the colonial cultures of the past (i.e. anti-homosexuality ideas) as law in their own lands as a memory of those things former colonialists had instigated there when they first arrived. If you want to know why so many black African countries punish homosexual or cross-gender people so harshly it is because white Europeans formerly taught them to. In fact, as anthropology increasingly fills out, there is a diverse tapestry of both sexuality and gender expression around the world that, until contact with European peoples and their values, had evaded its static and arbitrary orthodoxies. Any number of peoples across the globe, for example, know of various types of cross-dresser that accrue all sorts of cultural meanings and functions (most of which involve neither surgeries they could not perform nor European valorisations of their meaning) and often are valued as special in and of themselves. In Europe, however, and increasingly in the places Europeans went, this was stamped out for (and by) the Christian-inflected cultural alternative, the different and separate notions of man and woman related to each other in a specific and arbitrary way. If one wanted to “cross gender” now then one had to “pass” and this involved both danger (if caught) and inauthenticity. Capitalism, the dominant economic idea and economic relation of our time, was based upon, and laid on top of, these ideas of gender and produced a lack of gender equality which soon became readily apparent. There are, consequently, many examples of women who dressed as, and tried to appear as, men in order to find work in the centuries of the Industrial Revolution.

Feinberg maintains that this is all part of a rolling oppression, that has mutated even as culture itself has, across time and space. In the last 150 years it has taken on a new face and a new phase through the “insights” of sexology and the creation of the modern Western male and female, things which the first modern (medically transitioned)

transsexuals and then transgender people seemed to some to imperil. Attacks on those such as Christine Jorgensen, says Feinberg, “were part of a campaign meant to enforce conformity” in an era, as we now realise after the fact, of sex and gender upheaval. Feinberg, for example, mentions here medical advances such as the contraceptive pill (first produced in 1952) which suddenly gave women control over the consequences of their sexuality and enabled them to be much more liberal with it if they chose to be. Such developments were bitterly opposed by some men (with whom they have absolutely nothing to do) and this must partly be because they were held in the sway of ideas in which it was men who controlled the sexuality of women and not the women themselves. (Modern American conservatives, as one example, are still to this day looking for ways to outlaw such medications to once again take away control of their sexuality from women. It is all part of a conservative cultural agenda to prescribe gender and its relations and to control sexuality completely. See Project 2025 yet again for more.) Feinberg herself says that “rigidly enforced gender boundaries should have... been scrapped” but further observes that “the motor force of capitalism” can use the division that gender gives opportunity for.

In closing, Leslie Feinberg points out that the transgender person is often put forward in “entertainment” as the weird and sinister killer (see *Psycho*, *Dressed To Kill* and *Silence of the Lambs*), the person estranged from society who, lost in their own alienated fantasy, becomes the monster who is a danger. Many a “gender critical” seems happy to pimp this idea daily to millions of idiotic social media followers in tales of danger in the bathroom or the changing room. But Feinberg points out that this is the opposite of the truth: its transvestites and transsexuals, its gay men and cross-dressers, its sex and gender minorities who are themselves randomly and terribly murdered simply for being what they are. (Has anyone ever been murdered for being a normative cis heterosexual?) And

when a transsexual or a transvestite is murdered does it even make the news with the reason for them being singled out pointed out to the audience? Are trans voices solicited to comment on such direct and horrific violence? Does the news even know trans people exist? Perhaps it does but it seems as if it deliberately avoids them in a conspiratorial act of silencing. Transgender people, in Feinberg's use of the term, are those who should not be seen and not be heard, to reappropriate the famous saying. Trans people are other, different, separate. They are the basis for a division the malfeasant can use to create wedges in society, wedges which hinder solidarity. And so Feinberg finishes her piece by saying:

"The institutionalized bigotry and oppression we face today have not always existed. They arose with the division of society into exploiter and exploited. Divide-and-conquer tactics have allowed the slave-owners, feudal landlords and corporate ruling classes to keep for themselves the lion's share of wealth created by the laboring class. Like racism and all forms of prejudice, bigotry toward transgendered people is a deadly carcinogen. We are pitted against each other in order to keep us from seeing each other as allies. Genuine bonds of solidarity can be forged between people who respect each other's differences and are willing to fight their enemy together. We are the class that does the work of the world, and can revolutionize it. We can win true liberation. The struggle against intolerable conditions is on the rise around the world. And the militant role of transgendered women, men and youths in today's fight-back movement is already helping to shape the future."

The THIRD Queer of the Apocalypse is Sandy Stone as found in her seminal essay "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto". This essay, itself partly a response to vitriolic anti-trans rhetoric perpetrated by the anti-trans feminist Janice Raymond in her book *The Transsexual Empire* over a decade earlier which targeted Stone directly (she is a

trans woman), would subsequently come to be regarded as initiating a field of transgender studies itself. It does this by que(e)rying trans biography and autobiography, analysing how trans people are spoken about – and how trans people had been and were speaking about themselves – as subjects within Western (medically adjudicated) culture in an attempt to understand what being trans was taken to mean and how such a culture imagined it was achieved. This, in turn, then becomes part of a discussion which addresses how people themselves are seen more generally within society in relation to their embodiment and gender. An interesting aside at the start of this piece, in my context here in this book, is that Stone starts with a story about the “sex change” operation of the trans woman Jan Morris as told in her book *Conundrum*. Here we learn that it was carried out in “Room 5” (V) of the Casablanca clinic where it was performed. (“Become transfixed, become transfigured.”)

Stone’s essay fundamentally addresses what trans even is and problematises (in ways some sexology had done from its inception in regard to homosexuality, for example,) the notion that it is a medical issue at all. The fact remains, however, that in an imagined “scientific” or medicalised Western world the phenomenon of trans existence came to the fore via a medical route. Thus, when we talk about trans we might immediately come to think of “gender dysphoria” (a medical condition or diagnosis) or (in the early days, at least) “transsexualism”, something that, again, follows a medical pathway and procedures and suggests certain “treatment” in order to deal with it. Early centres for such things were Magnus Hirschfeld’s Berlin Sexual Institute (which was destroyed by the Nazis in 1933) and then a couple of American facilities at Johns Hopkins and Stanford. Stone focuses on the latter and particularly in regard to the program there which prospective patients had to go through in these formative years of the medical establishment interacting with trans as a phenomenon in order to work out how it intended to deal with

it expressly as a medical “complaint”. (That is, medics deal with things that are wrong with organically embodied consciousnesses and make them right. As such, trans then had to be something that needed, in some sense, fixing in such terms.) Here Stone reports that someone trans was thought of as having something of a “wrong body” problem, a kind of pathology. Transsexualism was made an “official disorder” in American medicine in 1980 and from then on appears in the *American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* as a result. This is not necessarily a good thing for it makes trans a medical problem in a way homosexuality, for example, is no longer imagined to be. You could say that, according to this account, trans people are “sick” and need medical intervention in order to be made well, a very specific and particular understanding of the situation.

In Stone’s close reading of several biographical accounts of trans people (which obviously includes reflection, sometimes autobiographical, on the mechanics and feelings of “changing sex”) she notices some interesting things, things that can only really be sourced from the culture of which they are a part. So, commenting on these in general, Stone remarks:

“Besides the obvious complicity of these accounts in a Western white male definition of performative gender, the authors also reinforce a binary, oppositional mode of gender identification. They go from being unambiguous men, albeit unhappy men, to unambiguous women. There is no territory between.”

Referring to a biography of Lili Elbe, upon whom the first “sex change” operation was performed in 1930 at Magnus Hirschfeld’s facility in Berlin, Stone notes that her biographer “must separate the subjectivity of ‘Andreas,’ (Lili’s deadname) who has never

felt anything for men, and 'Lili,' who, in the course of the narrative, wants to marry one. This salvaging procedure makes the world safe for 'Lili' by erecting and maintaining an impenetrable barrier between her and 'Andreas,' reinforced again and again in such ways as two different handwriting styles and two different voices." These are, of course, the same person, the same embodied subjectivity – and yet they are described as also not. A thick boundary line or border needs to be drawn between them so that they do not contaminate one another. A is not B. A becomes B. But A is not B. Stone continues, addressing several trans biographies, that:

"All these authors replicate the stereotypical male account of the constitution of woman: Dress, makeup, and delicate fainting at the sight of blood. Each of these adventurers passes directly from one pole of sexual experience to the other. If there is any intervening space in the continuum of sexuality, it is invisible. And nobody ever mentions wringing the turkey's neck. (A euphemistic term for a ritualistic last act of male masturbation before "sex change" surgery which Stone reports as customary prior to male-to-female operations.) No wonder feminist theorists have been suspicious. Hell, I'm suspicious."

It turns out, in fact, that trans people in these early decades (in America, at least) were actually being literally groomed not just to be "anatomical females" if viewed from the outside but "gendered females" as well (gendered *heterosexual* females, that is). The ideal candidate for surgery was then one who could not just convince a medic of the necessity of the surgery from a medical standpoint alone but also by their ability to live up to stereotypical gendered expectations. The "finished product", as it were, then not only had to look physically to the naked eye like a (sexy) woman but perform "being a woman" to perfection as well. The medics, it seemed, saw this as giving the patient the best chance for "success" – but "success" in what terms? In terms of passing as a woman in

regular society without disturbing or changing its gender relations at all. Such procedures were producing gendered women according to a cultural formula (exactly as Immortan Joe or Norsefire did in their own ways too) and these procedures even had a textbook, Harry Benjamin's *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, published in 1966, which candidates for surgery would read in order to present themselves as exemplary model patients to their medical supervisors. So the medics drew up their criteria for what the perfect woman would be and the trans people presenting for treatment, educating themselves on what was required in order to get what they wanted, mirrored it back to them. They became conformed to a cultural system of gender.

It is here that Stone interjects with a solid point of analysis, however, in reference to the biographical accounts of trans people produced and as commentary on this process:

"each of these accounts is culture speaking with the voice of an individual. The people who have no voice in this theorizing are the transsexuals themselves."

The point is that this is not exactly the most personally authentic procedure one can imagine. In and through it trans people are not expressing themselves but living up to a standard of gender someone else has set for them in order to get what they want. The trans people have no agency here (and, indeed, may be assumed not to have any since they are "sick"). Stone notes that there is no definitively trans discourse to counter the culturally derived medical one to which they must subject themselves in order to get their gender affirming care. Like Furiosa in Immortan Joe's hierarchy, trans people must "disappear" in order to fit in or risk devastating consequences. (Note here that Furiosa only fits in, first, by being acquired as a stereotypical breeding female or, latterly, as a Dogman and then as one of Joe's military commanders – for which she is, and must be,

coded “masculine” in gendered terms. She could not survive there otherwise. But, as such, a female Furiosa disappears.) Stone comments of this:

“it is difficult to generate a counterdiscourse if one is programmed to disappear. The highest purpose of the transsexual is to erase him/herself, to fade into the ‘normal’ population as soon as possible. Part of this process is known as constructing a plausible history—learning to lie effectively about one’s past. What is gained is acceptability in society. What is lost is the ability to authentically represent the complexities and ambiguities of lived experience”

Western medical discourse, then, dealt with trans people by effectively making them disappear and by coercing them to aid and abet their own (inauthentic) disappearance. Stone describes this as “textual violence inscribed in the trans body”. A trans person, being engaged by such violence, is coerced to not stand out or soil the gender pot that has been prepared for them. It is about passing, about fitting in, about not disturbing anything. What it is not about is an autonomy of desire and agency in achieving it. It is not in ANY way about ambiguity or fluidity or refusal of cultural expectations. Rather, one must conform to them. But, says Stone:

“In the case of the transsexual, the varieties of performative gender, seen against a culturally intelligible gendered body which is itself a medically constituted textual violence, generate new and unpredictable dissonances which implicate entire spectra of desire.”

How does one AUTHENTICALLY deal with such desire? The medical culture says it is by becoming someone who passes, who disappears. But Stone disagrees. Passing, says Stone, “means the denial of mixture”, the refusal to acknowledge that what the trans person was before was simply an A and that what they have become is simply a B.

(Neither, by the way, are any of us, whatever we are, simply As or Bs either.) The carefully constructed attempt to portray this (complete with false histories and fake backstories and all) is an explicit fiction for the purpose of passing which, it might be suggested, is a less than authentic intention. In such activity actual individual lived experience, experience which is not just mirroring a prescribed stereotype, is closed off. Life becomes fully artificial and identikit. Life defined and lived this way *is not true*. Using literary language, Stone says of this process that “this process, in which both the transsexual and the medicolegal/psychological establishment are complicit, forecloses the possibility of a life grounded in the intertextual possibilities of the transsexual body.” Stone appears to be arguing that trans life is its own type of life and should not be inauthentically disappeared merely to fit in with a very heterosexually specific form of male/female binary. As a consequence, we might actually question if “wrong body” is an appropriate way to think about trans at all. We might ask if a cultural position which fixates on if someone has a penis or not is adequate to the embodied desires people can live and experience. We then need to ask if “wrong body” makes any sense *at all* and even if any kind of body *can ever be wrong*. One thing is for sure here though: Western culture conceives of just two kinds of right body – and all other bodies are wrong. Stone thinks we should challenge that idea too. Put in the terms of my apocalypse, this gendered culture must be queered.

Not all trans people are the same. (Just as, funnily enough, not all cis people are the same either.) There are some for whom being trans has nothing to do with genitalia or even with “dysphoria”. The medicolegal system (and, further down the line, political system) that deals with such people has a huge problem with them – for it bases itself on prescriptive criteria for what trans is (as a pathology) and what must be done about it so that it can be considered “appropriately handled”. Stone sees a problem with this for

trans is not simply a set of physical symptoms that require pre-determined solutions to solve them. Trans is an individually embodied existence that involves authenticity of both identity and desire and part of being trans is being at liberty to express both. There is no one description which can encompass all trans people and they cannot, and should not, be homogenised away. Such people are, in fact, evidence for a multiplicitous humanity with an experience of lived desire more diverse than controlling cultures seem able to bear witness to. They are a “physical and subjective intertextuality”, as Stone puts it. As a consequence, Stone suggests that “passing” is a lie and one which artificially constricts human experience and desire. Trans people are not the only people subject to this, of course. EVERYONE is performing (or not performing) passing every day for it is an aspect of human sociality (just like gender). But it can, nevertheless, be critiqued and criticised and what can pass can either be narrowed or expanded.

In closing, Stone talks of “deconstruct[ing] the necessity to pass”. By this she means a political act of authenticity and responsibility which consciously seeks to broaden and permanently expand human experience, including more of its desire. This is:

“as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body. The disruptions of the old patterns of desire that the multiple dissonances of the transsexual body imply produce not an irreducible alterity but a myriad of alterities, whose unanticipated juxtapositions hold what Donna Haraway has called the promises of monsters—physicalities of constantly shifting figure and ground that exceed the frame of any possible representation.”

So we are not one thing (of which there is an A type and a B type). We are the promise and actuality of many things, some maybe even monstrous (or so they may seem). Stone

encourages this and issues a courageous rhetoric that people read themselves, allow themselves to be read, in all their diversity, into the story of human life and experience so that one maybe then begin to consciously write oneself, now authentically, into those self-same stories. This she imagines as destroying the arbitrary and medically arbitrated “transsexual” discourse of the past and entering a “posttranssexual” era of the future. Or, as she writes this herself to finish:

“The essence of transsexualism is the act of passing. A transsexual who passes is obeying the Derridean imperative: ‘Genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix genres.’ I could not ask a transsexual for anything more inconceivable than to forgo passing, to be consciously ‘read,’ to read oneself aloud—and by this troubling and productive reading, to begin to write oneself into the discourses by which one has been written—in effect, then, to become a (look out—dare I say it again?) posttranssexual. Still, transsexuals know that silence can be an extremely high price to pay for acceptance. I want to speak directly to the brothers, sisters and others who may read/’read’ this and say: I ask all of us to use the strength which brought us through the effort of restructuring identity, and which has also helped us to live in silence and denial, for a re-visioning of our lives. I know you feel that most of the work is behind you and that the price of invisibility is not great. But, although individual change is the foundation of all things, it is not the end of all things. Perhaps it’s time to begin laying the groundwork for the next transformation.”

The FOURTH Queer of the Apocalypse is Kate Bornstein, a non-binary person who was assigned male at birth but has had sex reassignment surgery. Of themselves Bornstein, a writer and performer, has said, “I don’t call myself a woman, and I know I’m not a man.” But where, in Western culture, does that leave someone to go? Bornstein attempts to answer this in several of their books of which the first was *Gender Outlaw: On Men,*

Women, And the Rest of Us. A chapter of this book is excerpted and reprinted in *The Transgender Studies Reader* ("Gender Terror, Gender Rage") and this is what I shall focus on here. In this book Bornstein makes the argument that human beings are not "naturally gendered" (because, lest we forget, "nature" cannot speak for itself and is mute) but that human culture makes genders out of roles people play in relations they fashion.

In the particular chapter I'm focusing on here, Bornstein tells us that she used to think of "gender terrorism" as a matter of those who, playfully but purposefully, tried to fuck with the fact of gender as an enculturated and relational reality. However, over time she came to change her position. It was not these people who were the real gender terrorists: the real gender terrorists were the "Gender Defenders", the people who used that system as a terroristic weapon itself. So they are the Immortan Joes and Norsefires of the real world, the people who use gender as a weapon to beat everyone over the head with in order to achieve and regulate conformity. A gender terrorist to Bornstein here is every TERF, social conservative, gender critic and sex realist you've ever met. She quotes Murray S. Davis from his book *Smut: Erotic Reality/Obscene Ideology* in an attempt to show how such people take difference and diversity in this regard:

"[A]nything that undermines confidence in the scheme of classification on which people base their lives sickens them as though the very ground on which they stood precipitously dropped away. The vertigo produced by the loss of cognitive orientation is similar to that produced by the loss of physical orientation. Philosophic nausea, certain forms of schizophrenia, moral revulsion, negative experience, the horror of having violated a taboo, and the feeling of having been polluted are all manifestations of this mental mal de mer, occasioned by the sudden shipwreck of cognitive orientation which casts one adrift in a world without structure.

People will regard any phenomenon that produces this disorientation as 'disgusting' or 'dirty.' To be so regarded, however, the phenomenon must threaten to destroy not only one of their fundamental cognitive categories but their whole cognitive system."

Bornstein posits that this is what the gender diverse (or gender averse!) do for the Gender Defender (much as Judith Butler argued above, in fact). They appear as the opposite of desire, a physical revulsion. But is this a physical revulsion or is it a bodily expression of an intellectual collapse, a "consequential upheaval" of an imagined unchallengeable imaginary of gender identity and sexual orientation? Is it, in fact, a bodily expression of a threatened or potential intellectual and moral apocalypse, a premonition of total destruction? Bornstein explains it in her own terms further:

"The Gender Defender is someone who actively, or by knowing inaction, defends the status quo of the existing gender system, and thus perpetuates the violence of male privilege and all its social extensions. The gender defender, or gender terrorist, is someone for whom gender forms a cornerstone of their view of the world. Shake gender up for one of these folks, and you're in for trouble."

Bornstein theorises this as a kind of fear of those who dwell too near to the borders of defined and acceptable culture (let alone those bold enough to simply cross them). Once again we hear echoes of other queers of our apocalypse who made similar points about the need for strict boundaries and borders people are supposed to make sure they stay well away from. Clear delineation and demarcation seems part of the Western gender/sexuality system. So a Gender Defender/terrorist is the gay basher. A Gender Defender/terrorist is the middle class white lesbian exclusionary feminist. A Gender Defender/terrorist is the member of a Men's Movement (which today could be anything

from an incel fanboy of the pedophilic rapist, groomer and misogynist, Andrew Tate, to various conservative men's groups defined by ultimately religious and patriarchal ideals such as making sure you have a wife and that she is subservient to you). A Gender Defender/terrorist is the politician who wants to eradicate LGBTQ+ curricula (and funding) from education and the Arts. What bothers all these people, according to Bornstein, is that there are other people out there (like her and, no doubt, like me) who are not like them.

That, suggests Bornstein, threatens them because it threatens their worldview. It provides tangible, living and breathing, evidence of the contrary. As Bornstein says, commenting on the point she thinks Gore Vidal was making in his books *Myra Breckinridge* and *Myron*: "the existence of transgendered people – people who exist sexually for pleasure, and not procreation – strikes terror at the heart of our puritanical Eurocentric culture." And I agree that it does. In all my years studying and writing about anarchy I never found more convinced policemen than when it comes to matters of sex and what people do with their bodies (which includes how they dress and express them). Bornstein then formulates this fear (for it is a fear) perfectly when she states that "This culture attacks people on the basis of being or not being correctly gendered (having a politically correct body)." This is exactly it, a coercive politics of the body, and the fear is that how someone else conceives of and uses their body (which is an expression of its desires) must throw shade upon, or give context to, how I conceive of and use mine. Apparently in Western culture this requires that someone must be right and there can only be one right. That idea then requires policemen to deal with those who insist on, or persist in, being "wrong".

But then Bornstein, as is their way, confronts her reader expressly with a set of questions. Let's answer them:

Q: What is your gender?

A: At the moment I can go with non-binary, queer or genderqueer but I find such indicativeness is basically missing the point for I don't think words can map to felt or experienced realities in a one to one relation. I believe you can only feel or experience your gender rather than name it. (I consider naming a violent act if done by others.)

Q: When did you decide that?

A: I haven't decided it. Its a constantly fluid situation.

Q: How much say do you have in your gender?

A: Always only so much. Gender would make no sense without it being either relational or linguistically understood (language being both a social and cultural phenomenon). So it can never be just up to me.

Q: Is there anything about your gender or gender role that you don't like, or that gets in your way?

A: That others find it unintelligible and that their reaction is alienating.

Q: Are there one or two qualities about another gender that are appealing to you, enough so that you'd like to incorporate those qualities into your daily life?

A: No. I don't think of it as something you mix and match. I think of it in terms of personal expression and finding your own place in life. So let others be themselves and let me be me.

Q: What would happen to your life if you did that?

A: It would change. And I don't like change even though I realise it is inevitable and, in fact, always occurring.

Q: What would your gender then be?

A: Other. New. A further exploration of human experience and desire.

Q: How do you think people would respond to you?

A: They'd wonder why I can't just be normal.

Q: How would you feel if they did that?

A: An outsider (so no change there then).

In fact, probably the best thing about Kate Bornstein's books are their questions – and Bornstein is not shy of asking them and so precipitating your need to narrate your own story and have it make sense when put on public display. This also has the effect of critiquing gender itself and perhaps even asking if we need it at all.

For example, she asks here: "What are you being denied on account of your gender? What does a person of another gender have that you can't have?" and somewhere in and between all of the possible and actual answers myriad different people might or would give to those questions is something of the rhizome of experienced reality and manifest desire. Bornstein's point here is that none of the honest answers we might give, or honest stories we might tell, in authentically expressing and explaining ourselves are worthy of ridicule – let alone persecution, oppression or our eradication. No one deserves such things for who they are (even if they are on the side of the designated "freaks" as

Bornstein calls it). So if and when we receive such things they are undeserved, a prejudicial and bigoted attack, something we may hold justifiable rage in regard to. But Bornstein intimates that this can then all too easily fall into the politics of “us versus them” all over again – and people are always looking around for people to be against (and, Bornstein says, this is not only the fault of the conservative bad guys. We can all do it). But not every disagreement or dissension is an “oppression”. Sometimes its just a disagreement people try to rhetorically turn into an oppression as in when, in the traditional stereotype, “leftists” often find themselves engaged in purity wars with each other rather than united in their more necessary common goal of defeating a pernicious and oppressive conservatism. You can’t be oppressed by someone who is as badly off as you – but you can disagree with them about something and call it oppression. So Bornstein thinks that we need to properly define our targets and save our weapons for the real bad guys and not just people we don’t agree with:

“A correct target is the group that has both the will and the power to oppress you wherever you go. The correct target for any successful transsexual rebellion would be the gender system itself. But transsexuals won’t attack that system until they themselves are free of the need to participate in it.”

So Max shouldn’t be fighting Nux, or Furiosa, or the Vuvalini. He should be fighting *with them* against Immortan Joe (which is what happens). The people of Britain should be fighting with V, and then Evey, against Norsefire. What we need to do is create a world where room is made for difference and alterity so that simply being different doesn’t start an argument – but the forces of authoritarian capitalism will have something to say about that for their standard tactic for decades, if not centuries, is “divide and rule” (as we see in both of the fictional stories I have discussed above). This, as Bornstein notes, is

actually how gender itself is being used in order to say “men are not women and women are not men – and this matters”. On and from that absolute divide hierarchies and exploitations and coercions can be built. But *does* it matter? And can we make it so it doesn’t?

My FIFTH and final Queer of the Apocalypse is Susan Stryker, a further transgender woman, who has been one of the foremost trans scholars (and scholars of Transgender Studies) in academia in recent decades. In her essay “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage” Stryker wants to retell Mary Shelley’s story of Frankenstein’s monster from trans perspective (in what was a response to Sandy’s Stone call for new narratives that I discussed above) recalling that, in that story, the monster talks back *and for itself*. This can then become the discursive site for an interaction between trans and queer authenticity and the classificatory and normativising intent of medical practice in which the monster, a thing outside those classifications and intentions, speaks for itself. The essay itself is a textual adaptation of what was, more originally, a performance piece. That being so, it would seem apposite to give my readers a flavour of Stryker’s monologue in this piece as a good place to start:

“The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster’s as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist.

I am not the first to link Frankenstein's monster and the transsexual body. Mary Daly makes the connection explicit by discussing transsexuality in "Boundary Violation and the Frankenstein Phenomenon," in which she characterizes transsexuals as the agents of a "necrophilic invasion" of female space... Janice Raymond, who acknowledges Daly as a formative influence, is less direct when she says that "the problem of transsexuality would best be served by morally mandating it out of existence," but in this statement she nevertheless echoes Victor Frankenstein's feelings toward the monster: "Begone, vile insect, or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust. You reproach me with your creation"... It is a commonplace of literary criticism to note that Frankenstein's monster is his own dark, romantic double, the alien Other he constructs and upon which he projects all he cannot accept in himself; indeed, Frankenstein calls the monster "my own vampire, my own spirit set loose from the grave". Might I suggest that Daly, Raymond and others of their ilk similarly construct the transsexual as their own particular golem?

The attribution of monstrosity remains a palpable characteristic of most lesbian and gay representations of transsexuality, displaying in unnerving detail the anxious, fearful underside of the current cultural fascination with transgenderism. Because transsexuality more than any other transgender practice or identity represents the prospect of destabilizing the foundational presupposition of fixed genders upon which a politics of personal identity depends, people who have invested their aspirations for social justice in identitarian movements say things about us out of sheer panic that, if said of other minorities, would see print only in the most hate-riddled, white supremacist, Christian fascist rags...

... I want to lay claim to the dark power of my monstrous identity without using it as a weapon against others or being wounded by it myself. I will say this as bluntly as I know

how: I am a transsexual, and therefore I am a monster. Just as the words "dyke," "fag," "queer," "slut," and "whore" have been reclaimed, respectively, by lesbians and gay men, by anti-assimilationist sexual minorities, by women who pursue erotic pleasure, and by sex industry workers, words like "creature," "monster," and "un-natural" need to be reclaimed by the transgendered. By embracing and accepting them, even piling one on top of another, we may dispel their ability to harm us. A creature, after all, in the dominant tradition of Western European culture, is nothing other than a created being, a made thing. The affront you humans take at being called a "creature" results from the threat the term poses to your status as "lords of creation," beings elevated above mere material existence. As in the case of being called "it," being called a "creature" suggests the lack or loss of a superior personhood. I find no shame, however, in acknowledging my egalitarian relationship with non-human material Being; everything emerges from the same matrix of possibilities. "Monster" is derived from the Latin noun monstrum, "divine portent," itself formed on the root of the verb monere, "to warn." It came to refer to living things of anomalous shape or structure, or to fabulous creatures like the sphinx who were composed of strikingly incongruous parts, because the ancients considered the appearance of such beings to be a sign of some impending supernatural event. Monsters, like angels, functioned as messengers and heralds of the extraordinary. They served to announce impending revelation, saying, in effect, "Pay attention; something of profound importance is happening."

Hearken unto me, fellow creatures. I who have dwelt in a form unmatched with my desire, I whose flesh has become an assemblage of incongruous anatomical parts, I who achieve the similitude of a natural body only through an unnatural process, I offer you this warning: the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for

yourself at my expense. You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic Womb has birthed us both. I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. I challenge you to risk abjection and flourish as well as have I. Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself."

This monologue, it seems to me, fits extremely well in a queer apocalypse. It is certainly revelatory – which would seem a minimum requirement. And it is also a voice from a beyond, a portent. This continues in the "criticism" section of the essay that expands (and expounds) upon the monologue. For example:

"My own experience as a transsexual parallels the monster's in this regard. The consciousness shaped by the transsexual body is no more the creation of the science that refigures its flesh than the monster's mind is the creation of Frankenstein. The agenda that produced hormonal and surgical sex reassignment techniques is no less pretentious, and no more noble, than Frankenstein's. Heroic doctors still endeavor to triumph over nature. The scientific discourse that produced sex reassignment techniques is inseparable from the pursuit of immortality through the perfection of the body, the fantasy of total mastery through the transcendence of an absolute limit, and the hubristic desire to create life itself. Its genealogy emerges from a metaphysical quest older than modern science, and its cultural politics are aligned with a deeply conservative attempt to stabilize gendered identity in service of the naturalized heterosexual order."

This much, by now, and hearing the words of our Queers of the Apocalypse, should be well understood. But have we also realised that "Transsexual embodiment, like the embodiment of the monster, places its subject in an unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a Nature in which it must nevertheless exist"? The transsexual, says

Stryker, is like a lesbian under the authoritarian government of Norsefire or like a woman free and at liberty in the Citadel of Immortan Joe – an unnatural impossibility. The trans person finding themselves in this position finds themselves at odds with a discursive Nature entrenched in their culture as “normality”, their personal feelings, experience and desire completely disregarded (if ever even recognised to begin with) as irrelevant. They are simply impossible outsiders, beings living in contravention of imagined reality. They have no voice of their own (as mainstream media habitually demonstrates) and they are not meant to have a voice for they are monstrous, those whose flesh becomes a barrier estranging them both from their desire but also from more social desires their being disqualifies them for under the arbitrating gaze of society. But personal desires, when they are inevitably trans-shaped, are coded “unnatural” anyway by the dominant ones and so they too are despised even as the creatures which harbour them. Trans people (as an example of queer ones more generally, or so I contend) are those who, to a large extent, cannot change their circumstances, surrounded by all-encompassing oppression as they are. AND SO THEY DETERMINE TO CHANGE THEMSELVES and, in that metamorphosis, to change their relationship to reality and to other people as well. This is not just a moment of revelation, of apocalypse: it is also a moment of RAGE.

Of this “transgender rage” Stryker writes:

“The rage itself is generated by the subject’s situation in a field governed by the unstable but indissoluble relationship between language and materiality, a situation in which language organizes and brings into signification matter that simultaneously eludes definitive representation and demands its own perpetual rearticulation in symbolic terms. Within this dynamic field the subject must constantly police the boundary constructed by its own founding in order to maintain the fictions of “inside” and “outside” against a regime of

signification/materialization whose intrinsic instability produces the rupture of subjective boundaries as one of its regular features...

... Transgender rage is a queer fury, an emotional response to conditions in which it becomes imperative to take up, for the sake of one's own continued survival as a subject, a set of practices that precipitates one's exclusion from a naturalized order of existence that seeks to maintain itself as the only possible basis for being a subject. However, by mobilizing gendered identities and rendering them provisional, open to strategic development and occupation, this rage enables the establishment of subjects in new modes, regulated by different codes of intelligibility. Transgender rage furnishes a means for disidentification with compulsorily assigned subject positions."

The immediate cause of Stryker's own rage, so it turns out, is the birth of a baby, at which she was present, the birth of her lover's daughter. And then it hits her:

"It was the non-consensuality of the baby's gendering. You see, I told myself, wiping snot off my face with a shirt sleeve, bodies are rendered meaningful only through some culturally and historically specific mode of grasping their physicality that transforms the flesh into a useful artifact. Gendering is the initial step in this transformation, inseparable from the process of forming an identity by means of which we're fitted to a system of exchange in a heterosexual economy. Authority seizes upon specific material qualities of the flesh, particularly the genitals, as outward indication of future reproductive potential, constructs this flesh as a sign, and reads it to enculturate the body. Gender attribution is compulsory; it codes and deploys our bodies in ways that materially affect us, yet we choose neither our marks nor the meanings they carry. This was the act accomplished between the beginning and the end of that short sentence in the delivery room: "It's a girl." This was the act that

recalled all the anguish of my own struggles with gender. But this was also the act that enjoined my complicity in the non-consensual gendering of another. A gendering violence is the founding condition of human subjectivity; having a gender is the tribal tattoo that makes one's personhood cognizable. I stood for a moment between the pains of two violations, the mark of gender and the unlivability of its absence. Could I say which one was worse? Or could I only say which one I felt could best be survived?"

Let me try and explain this for myself in terms of the two fictions I have been working with above. Why were Norsefire's Britain and Immortan Joe's Citadel places of coercive gender roles and coercive sexuality? Why were they places of violence? Why were things oppressively dominating? *Because they had to be fitted into an arbitrary and authoritarian economy, a relational system of exchange.* Susan Stryker, however, in her testimony, tells us that *we are, right here and right now, in the same situation too.* (We are similarly in "the Wasteland".) We, like these fictional characters I have discussed, are also subject to authority that is hierarchical, patriarchal and systematic. We are subject to socially compulsory judgments and, should we not agree with them, we will find ourselves cast as antagonists to the prevailing state of affairs *through no fault of our own* (for not everything is a choice, something we could be blamed for). We are subjected to classification and expected to slip into social roles accordingly in an example of what Foucault called "biopolitics". This social system will expect and coerce our collaboration with it and resistance will mark us out as refuseniks who, should our resistance and refusal become obvious and open, may be marked for social and political consequences. At this point we shall have to decide what our authenticity demands or requires and how we are going to respond to the "gendering violence" which constitutes us socially and even makes us visible. The problem is that, in opposing this system and its violence, we

implicitly question its legitimacy in the eyes of those beholden to it. And so, as Stryker says towards the end of her essay:

"To encounter the transsexual body, to apprehend a transgendered consciousness articulating itself, is to risk a revelation of the constructedness of the natural order. Confronting the implications of this constructedness can summon up all the violation, loss, and separation inflicted by the gendering process that sustains the illusion of naturalness. My transsexual body literalizes this abstract violence. As the bearers of this disquieting news, we transsexuals often suffer for the pain of others, but we do not willingly abide the rage of others directed against us. And we do have something else to say, if you will but listen to the monsters: the possibility of meaningful agency and action exists, even within fields of domination that bring about the universal cultural rape of all flesh. Be forewarned, however, that taking up this task will remake you in the process."

The point is that in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* we are supposed to have sympathy for the creature. It speaking in its own voice, and clearly with its own consciousness for which Victor Frankenstein was not responsible, we are meant to respond positively to its obvious personhood and moral worth and intelligence. The monster may be other, this cannot be denied, but being other is not enough to make it invalid. Its invalidity, in fact, survives the challenge of its obvious monstrosity. So this creature, this being, IS a portent and IS a revelation. Something new (and wonderful) has taken place. The world has been changed. Reality (and experience and desire) has been expanded. In like manner, so Stryker seems to suggest, the trans person did not ask to be made this way. (in truth, NONE OF US DID.) But is the outsider nature of trans being then reason to cast them out, wish them dead, act to eradicate them? The message of *Frankenstein* is that the monster has both worth and an integrity of its own (as well as *its own story to tell*). It has an ability

to ally its own monstrosity with “nature” too. And so, speaking to all similar monsters, Stryker ends her essay by saying: “May you discover the enlivening power of darkness within yourself. May it nourish your rage. May your rage inform your actions, and your actions transform you as you struggle to transform your world.”

By Way Of (Not) Coming To An End...

They did not live “happily ever after”. Does anyone? Both the fictions I have interacted with in this text end by not ending but by just stopping (as is the fate of this text itself, in fact). In *V for Vendetta* we are left to wonder if the people of Britain rose to the challenge V and then Evey Hammond placed before them. In *Mad Max* the Wasteland will carry on and people will still have to daily deal with both its challenges and its realities. There is no Utopia (“Utopia”, of course, literally meaning “Nowhere” anyway) and people who wish for one literally chase after nothing, an escape from material and possibly also immaterial reality itself. Unfortunately, if you happen to exist then you are in the shit. You are in a world and, as the History Man says, must deal with its “cruelties”. This, all by itself, is a hard lesson to learn but it turns out that learning is probably one of the best things we sentient beings can do. That conclusion being reached, however, what other things can we learn from the preceding 290 odd pages of text? I have thirteen points to address before this text comes to an apparent end and you, my reader, are left to go on with your life. So let’s come to the end of this journey together before going our separate ways.

1. Desire. What is our desire for? What is our desire creating?

Latterly in this queer apocalypse I began talking about “autonomy of desire” as a marker of the queer. This was as a challenge to the many arbitrary metanarratives that coercive

others, and systems of thought (which, working through human beings, become economic, moral and political systems with a very real materiality), can impose upon us. Desire itself, we may muse, seems something that comes along with being a human being. It is something material and embodied, a seemingly necessary attribute of human life. We have desires, which are not intellectual but more instinctual qualities, for many different things (e.g. sustenance, sex, love, to be heard) and these all seem part of a regime of care of the self. This is to say that without these desires we would be worse off and our experience of our lives would be sub-optimal. So our desire is creating a life for ourselves in which we can continue to survive and flourish. The issue with desire I have raised in this study is that it be self-directed in a context in which no one is simply a solipsistic self but where autonomy and cooperation in desire should go hand in hand. We need to be free to make our own choices, with agency, but also free to make cooperative associations in order to live in healthy social circumstances. This involves being in circumstances in which desires are not denied or even opposed in coercive or authoritarian ways. Desire, I am then saying, is basic to physical and mental health, an embodied attribute of all human life, and we should live in societies in which desires are taken seriously, and even actively fed and encouraged, as a consequence.

2. Queer means attack: proactivity and direct action.

Because I have stated that queer is a matter of “autonomy of desire” and because, in the words of the slogan, “queer means attack”, it follows that queer must be a matter of proactivity and direct action. Queer challenges hegemonies and hierarchies. It challenges coercion and domination. It believes in the autonomy, agency and freedom of the individual as an aspect of any healthy sociality. (To repeat, autonomy and cooperation go together.) Thus, it refuses domination and coercion. It refuses to be exploited. And in that

refusal it goes on the attack in the defence of the values that it regards as those which will be good not only for oneself but for others more timid as well. If one exists as one who is different and defends that difference against homogenising authoritarianism then one must go on the offensive (as a defensive tactic) in order to do it. Just like V did. Just like those charging back towards the Citadel did. Queer means attack. In this is the realisation that you can only ever really get what you want and need *if you simply try to get it*. No one is going to just give it to you – especially if they have reasons not to. So act for yourselves and, in so doing, act knowing that it will give others the same freedoms too. Act knowing that autonomy only exists when people act with autonomy (singularly or together). Autonomy of desire is for everyone and so is acting with agency and freedom too.

3. Seeing the world for ourselves: on not being a hostage to ideas.

In the stories I have reflected upon we saw how there were different ways of thinking operative in each. A key value pointed up in both (although more so in *V for Vendetta*) was that people should think for themselves lest they become hostages and captives to dominating ways of thinking – and ways of thinking by which they themselves become dominated. Everyone in the orbit of Immortan Joe, for example, was conformed to his cult (or nearly everybody. He found out too late who wasn't!) and that gave him immense local power over others. In Norsefire-controlled Britain that fascist organisation sought to control the thinking of everyone on a day to day basis. In achieving that, they could proceed to control a whole country as they saw fit. The people of Britain had to be reminded by V of their potential for change and what road they had allowed themselves to be taken down which had led to their incarcerated situation. These themes are all mightily relevant in today's world where bad actors and outright criminals seek

Presidencies and Prime Ministerships or run huge global media companies expressly setting out to baldly lie, cheat and steal in order to win power and enslave billions of people. Thinking for yourself, having your own standards of acceptability, not being led by the nose by anyone, then become vital attributes of anyone's character, attributes which can literally save us from political tyranny and the authoritarian ways of others. We must, consequently, learn not to put the intellectual handcuffs on ourselves and subsequently make it so much easier for those who would imprison us in worlds which are working for them but expressly against us. That means giving no free runs to tyrants, capitalists, climate change deniers, white supremacists, racists, sexists, etc. If we all had our own free minds then societies could simply not be so easily led to their own destruction and held within imprisoning relationships it seems almost impossible to break.

4. A rhizome of stories (lives, experiences, desires).

One of the images conjured up for me through these studies (not least latterly through the words of my Five Queens of the Apocalypse) is that the human world is made up of stories. These are, necessarily, personalised stories for we each function as singularities even if within social contexts which make that singularity possible by giving us language, culture, ethics and more material things like company and sustenance too. So things come to matter to us intellectually in a personal way as our lives proceed each on their singular paths through various connections and relationships which we all experience over time. These go to make up our lives and our senses of personal identity and the world which develop along with us as we go. This story is itself then fundamentally a story of human diversity and that we are not all the same – and neither should we be. Having different characters, personalities, beliefs, proclivities, sexualities, desires, etc., is all perfectly normal and natural. In fact, letting this rhizome of differences grow organically in its own

way without deliberate coercion or interference, making connections and forming relations as and when it does all by itself, is, so we might argue, then part of what might make our lives both rich and meaningful – and lead to other new and interesting stories which might never have happened in any other way. This vision is to think of life as one great example of intertextuality as all the stories that we are and we have interact with each other as they may to give an intellectual and spiritual vibrancy to life where this is both totally anarchic and completely uncontrolled, a freedom of storied association.

5. Love not violence, cooperation not war.

This is the message of both the stories I chose to focus on in the main body of the text and of several of my queer oracles latterly. Under patriarchy and its more recent associates, capitalism and nation states, we see a world run on the basis of hierarchy, domination, violence and war. This is the stuff of a lot of apocalypses in which, as is often the case, some dominating power is oppressing someone who tells an apocalypse to explain how this evil power will eventually be overcome by the righteous ones who never deserved their oppression to begin with, whose cause is just and so who must win in the end because justice is that value we, the story's tellers, value most of all and want to see victorious. In the case of this queer apocalypse this is a story of love and peaceful cooperation defeating the authoritarian violence of war. It is arguing that slaughter achieves nothing but death and that it changes nothing about the world thereafter either. It is the empty, pointless victory of ugliness and the cruel, miserable victory of the loveless and unlovable. Cooperation and love, on the other hand, give value to life and make great deeds possible. Cooperation and love create and sustain life. Violence and war can only ever take it – whilst making a prison of life in the meantime. So, you know, make love not war!

6. The personal and the social: authenticity and ethics. (Becoming part of bigger stories)

A thought that occurred to me as I was going through this text and editing it was how the themes it covers encompass both personal and social areas. I have already sort of referenced this in the thought that autonomy and cooperation go together in the sort of world I am envisioning. But, instead of autonomy and cooperation, we might also think of this in terms of authenticity and ethics. Both of the stories I have covered contain multiple examples of both authenticity and ethics and show how they are necessary in a wasteland like theirs (and ours). But it is never a case of one to the exclusion of the other. In the Wasteland if you look out for yourself alone then you will probably get dead in short order because having someone to watch your back is actually a great advantage. Max, in fact, finds colleagues that help him out in every film he's in (as does Furiosa) but that stops neither of them being authentic people who stay true to themselves as well. In *V for Vendetta* we have the ongoing discussion about violence in which V ends up conceding that violence is for a purpose and not an habitual means of living. Thus his own authenticity in wanting to break Norsefire's hold over the people is tempered by the ethical context of Evey's questioning of the means. This, it seems to me, is all actually about each of us becoming part of stories bigger than our own in which the needs of others exist to balance the needs of ourselves. On this thinking neither pure, unmitigated selfishness nor complete and total altruism is ideal and a healthy balance must be struck which fulfills both the needs of ourselves but also those of others. If, as I spoke about in my fourth point, we create conditions where we allow our stories to naturally interact and connect with, and relate to, those of others, we will find that both our own authenticity and an ethical culture are fostered accordingly. It is not about giving up one for the sake of the other but about fostering both simultaneously.

7. Role models?

A question that popped into my head reading this text again was if either of the stories I considered contains any role models. Is there anyone in these stories we should strive to be like or to emulate in our own lives in our own wasteland? Examples here might be Max and Furiosa from the first story or V, Evey and Valerie from the second. None of these people, of course, not least as fictional characters, set out to be role models or were put up as people to be emulated. But are they? And should we take them as such? Personally, I find this a dubious prospect in general and in the abstract but, on the other hand, the anarchistic characterisation of Max as one who always determines to go his own way, yet without simply being selfish (he always seems to end up helping someone – at cost to himself) appeals to me. Then there is the fearless courage of the lesbian Valerie in *V for Vendetta* who, even under torture and close to death in Larkhill, testifies to a stranger in the next cell and gives voice to her unbreakable authenticity, a voice of love in a place of systemic violence. These are the “role models” that speak to me in their displays of authentic ethicality and autonomy of desire but you are, of course, free to choose your own for yourselves accordingly.

8. The sociology of knowledge (e.g. gender/sexuality).

I think the stories I have exampled here, not least as demonstrated in the commentary I have appended to them, demonstrate that knowledge is not some abstract and eternal object, something fixed and “real” waiting to be found by appropriately enlightened human beings (but then how to become so enlightened?), but something historical, cultural and social, something that can be given a narrative of how it came to be called and thought of as “knowledge”. Put another way, this is to say that knowledge is

something fitted to people and their purposes rather than “getting reality right” or “corresponding with fixed truth”. A fantastic example of this is the various discussions of gender/sexuality that go on throughout both stories. These discuss different views various characters or organisations take to these things, and their various effects, both positive and negative, and never remotely suggest that such “knowledge” is a matter of an antecedent, authoritative and self-declaring “truth” that anyone has any duty to do obeisance before. Instead people, liberating and incarcerating, organise their worlds as they see fit and create the knowledges (or guiding fictions of knowledges) by which they wish to live and which they wish to share with others. This is as true of Immortan Joe and Norsefire as it is of the Vuvalini, V, Valerie and Evey. It is for all of these characters about creating culture and these cultures are about instantiating values in a community of people and creating certain types of relationships accordingly based on shared stories.

9. Power and its dynamics (queer power now).

Both the stories I have discussed and the queer commentary I have latterly given have focused on power, its presence in life and its relationships, and its various dynamics. That said, it should be pointed out that the purpose of this particular apocalypse is to argue for a queer approach to power (an autonomy of desire, fluidity, ambiguity, and a desire for a resistance against power by the diverse whom it oppresses by telling, and instantiating, different and simply other stories, etc.) rather than an authoritarian one. In even having this discussion, in fact, and in writing this entire text, the point has been to highlight the political circumstances we are living in and what people, by their acquiescence and subservience, allow to take place and to happen day after day in their slavish obedience to power. The systems of power that surround us and control us did not get there by accident and neither did we wake up to find they had just appeared out of the blue one

day. Neither do they maintain themselves on their own. They were, in fact, deliberately created and are habitually maintained on the basis of deliberative political thinking and the manipulations of some by others in order to create material conditions upon the earth and certain forms of relationships, but not others, between human beings. This is based on the articulation and material reality of certain intellectual ideas (such as man/woman, boss/worker, leader/follower, have/have not, white/black, rich/poor, innocent/guilty) which are physically and materially enforced in order to lead to the material conditions sought for by those with the power. These conditions sought for are not based on a recognition of alterity or diversity, an autonomy of desire, since that leads to an equality of thought and value detrimental to the structural inequality (of wealth and power) such people seek. As such, this apocalypse entreats all who have a care for ending such oppression to have a mind to the dynamics of power, and to the power relations that pertain between people, and to work towards dynamics which make huge power imbalances more impossible than not. What is sought after is an equality of freedom and diversity in which the binaries I have just suggested above become impossible to maintain and so cease to exist.

10. Queer = Anarchy

Might I now suggest that anarchy is queer? (In *V for Vendetta* we might say this is something of a theme.) There are certainly some common interests – not the least of these being the complete dissolution and further impossibility of the systemic power relations I have just been referring to. Both queer and anarchy value personal agency and autonomy and freedom of association. Both contradict the very idea of societal domination with dogmas of fixed social or sexual relations. Both set themselves out as ethics of natural diversity. To queer something is to make space for new lives, new

experiences and new desires without disdaining them simply because they are different. In anarchy personal authenticity is respected via an ethic of liberty that is personal and social. Both queer and anarchy find meaning in the notions, already set out, that autonomy and cooperation go together and that authenticity and ethics do too. We can say, then, that there are considerable grounds for compatibility here and that anarchy and queer are both about rainbows.

11. Anti-authoritarianism.

A fundamental aim in writing this apocalypse has been to undermine the claims of authority. ANY AUTHORITY. AUTHORITY, PERIOD. This is somewhat contrary to type because apocalypses are often about the imagined right authority re-establishing its place as the king of the hill in a world where any challenger to that authority has now been thoroughly routed. But as a piece that is written from a queer point of view in a book about anarchy authority can just not be allowed to stand and its claims must ALWAYS be exposed as false, detrimental to people in general, and freedom-denying. Every book I have ever written about anarchy has contained multiple examples of why authority (political, moral, economic, military, intellectual, etc., etc.) is bad and I expect every other book I ever write about it will too. The fact is that the kind of societies that can be imagined within a queer and anarchist frame of reference do not contain leaders, bosses, masters, exploiters or dominators. The only form of dominants they do imagine are ones that exist within an arena of consensual sexual play! The queer and anarchist view is that domination is not appropriate to general political reality and so a strongly anti-authoritarian position, intellectually and morally as politically and economically, is taken up which encourages autonomy, agency and free association amongst people in general who, working together on the basis of cooperating on their desires, find ways to

exist and prosper that eschew leaders, and so authority, entirely. This is a different form of community to that which the West has latterly been used to but it is one, people like me insist, which must come if the authoritarians are not to kill us all first and it becomes too late. As we have seen in the stories I commented upon, violence and war based on overt authoritarianism are here confronted with love and cooperation and a determination that, after the war others started and pursued is won, violence and authoritarianism will not be the rule thereafter. This is the course plotted in this apocalypse too. After the war we did not start is won, we must learn the sense of cooperative, loving peace. Cooperation and love must, in fact, be our means to that reality right now. Authorities must, consequently, be undermined and subverted.

*"We're a long way from home
Welcome to the Pleasure dome
On our way home
Going home where lovers roam
Long way from home
Welcome to the Pleasure dome"*
(Frankie Goes to Hollywood)

12. The personal voice.

It is to be noted that throughout this text there has been a surfeit of personal voices. Ones that come to mind are Max, Nux, Furiosa, various of Immortan Joe's escaping "ex-wives", V, Evey, Valerie and all of my Five Queens of the Apocalypse. Partly, this was what made me think of what had been going on in terms of "stories" (for everybody has one, even Immortan Joe, Dementus and Adam Susan, Eric Finch, Helen Heyer and Rosemary

Almond. We should also, of course, not forget mine, your author's). But what value should we give these things? It seems to me that in all that has been said we should give it the highest of valuations for what, ultimately, is "the personal voice" but the integrity and intimacy of human communication expressed through the stories we tell about ourselves (always in the context of others and their stories too) which constitute our experiences and identities formed into narratives and ideas? We might, in fact, call our stories "testimonies" and "testimony", in fact, (what in other terms might be referred to as "witness" – see the War Boys – and in yet others as martyrdom – which comes from the Greek verb "to witness") is found to be all bound up with apocalypse. In Revelation 1, for example, John (the imagined receiver of the heavenly vision) "testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw" in what is his own example of a personal voice. Revelation itself, "The Apocalypse", is relayed as the personal vision of one man, a message from Jesus (who is said to have his own testimony). That someone is here "giving their own word" in something is meant to be taken in good faith by the reader as part of an act of authentic communication.

Now, of course, this does not mean that we are duty bound to believe everybody just in order to honour the personal voice and give it respect. But, then again, how often, in these days of deliberate social media disinformation, trolling and lies, do we listen to, or read, anybody "in good faith" at all? When someone "speaks for themselves" it is imagined that what is coming to us is direct and unfiltered and this, we might suggest, is worthy of more consideration than the anecdote, the third hand "he said, she said" or the piece of gossip of unknown provenance (let alone the outright, unattributed lie). It used to be said that someone's word was their bond (meaning that a person's worth or trustworthiness was dependent on the reliability and honesty of their communication). Those days are probably behind us in a world of deliberate and unattributable misinformation. But, as in

the book of Revelation, there is still place in an apocalypse for the person who says "This happened to me, listen to what I have to say." People should be judged by their words and actions but, where they are being honest, they should also be heard (and whether we end up agreeing with them or not). Modern human communication has been completely degraded by bad actors intent on disrupting social cohesion in a terminal way. We can only put love and respect back in our social world if we let others speak and hear them out. Communication is a two way thing and any working polity must ultimately be communicative and conversational. You can't do that if no one is listening or one person insists on doing all the talking. The personal voice is then an opportunity to listen to someone's story or point of view and make our communicative polity itself more diverse, more inclusive, more respectful and more honest.

13. To live as outlaws: trans and queer as liberation.

As we have seen in both of the stories considered and discussed above, when authority seizes power and holds populations captive in a fixed set of social relations it falls to those who think otherwise, to those who are coerced and oppressed and exploited, to rebel and to resist. It may, in fact, even fall to them to attempt to bring down the power that is oppressing them and a whole lot of others too. This is what happens in both of the stories I have discussed in different ways. It is also what happens, although perhaps with not such predictable success since actuality is not a fictional story written for the screen or the comic book that demands at least a semi-positive resolution, in real life. I have given examples in my discussion of violence in the context of *V for Vendetta* of those who took that responsibility upon themselves in real life as well. Unfortunately for these people, the ending was not quite so open or undetermined. However, what they do example, together with the more fictional rebels and freedom fighters that I have

discussed (although whether someone like Valerie is either of these things is a moot point. She was just someone caught in oppression because violent authority determined that her kind of life was not allowed, an ever present danger when authoritarians are allowed to gain power), is that freedom from oppression is presented to no one on a plate. When the boot is placed on your neck there may only be you, and those like or sympathetic to you, to rely on to remove it. All that evil requires is that good people do nothing, blah, blah, blah. You get the point.

In context, what is being said here is that the queer and the anarchist are outlaw philosophies, rebel mentalities that resist and revolt against coercive authority and oppressive power. To be possessed of these mentalities is to take a stance against power and authority for the freedom of the individual and the group to live autonomous lives decided on the basis of their own agency according to a freedom of association. In gender/sex context in this apocalypse this is why I have always really taken the view that LGBTQ+ people are actually rebels too – for patriarchal, heterosexist cis society sees them, institutionally and individually, as different and other. They are ploughing individual and collective furrows of human desire that a majority may not want to and so, even today, in 2024, we still see much discrimination against such people even as we saw it 40 years ago when Alan Moore was writing *V for Vendetta* expressly against a Conservative government which wanted to ban the teaching of homosexuality and suggested it was immoral and dangerous. To be LGBTQ+, to be of colour, to be poor, to be female, to not want to be exploited or dominated, economically and politically, by capitalism or advertising or coercion of your daily activities by those seeking to make money from them is, in our time, to be oppressed. Not to want that, to seek to avoid it, or subvert or undermine it, is to become an outlaw.

So I say EMBRACE IT. BECOME AN OUTLAW. BECOME AN OUTLAW WHO FIGHTS AND RESISTS. AND DO IT LIKE V, LIKE FURIOSA, LIKE VALERIE, LIKE MAX, WITH HONEST, RESPONSIBLE, AUTHENTICITY.

This world will not be changed by cowards or collaborators, by people hoping authority doesn't notice them who cower inauthentically throughout their lives and obediently play the game of policing others. Such people are doing the authoritarian's job for them. Every fight has its casualties and requires those prepared to pay a price for their desires. The annals of both anarchist and queer history contain many such people. In my fictional stories V was killed and Furiosa nearly was. In the real world queer and trans people are attacked and killed regularly, I am sad to say. Anarchists are imprisoned merely for saying "resist". So this is not a drill. A different world, a different kind of life, requires actions, and actors, to create it. It requires rebels, resistance and revolt.

The only question you now have to answer, when all is said and done, in response to that is:

IS THAT GOING TO BE YOU?

WHAT IS YOUR ETHIC AND YOUR AUTHENTICITY?

"Good evening, London. I would introduce myself but, truth to tell, I do not have a name. You can call me 'V'. Since Mankind's dawn, a handful of oppressors have accepted the responsibility over our lives that we should have accepted for ourselves. By doing so, they took our power. By doing nothing, we gave it away. We've seen where their way leads, through camps and wars, towards the slaughterhouse. In anarchy, there is another way.

With anarchy, from rubble comes new life, hope reinstated. They say anarchy's dead, but see, reports of my death were... exaggerated. Tomorrow Downing Street will be destroyed, the Head reduced to ruins, an end to what has gone before. Tonight, you must choose what comes next. Lives of our own, or a return to chains. Choose carefully. And so, ADIEU."

(*V for Vendetta*, Book III, Chapter 10)

(C). Conan The Barbarian - A Question of Civilisation and Barbarism

Speaking of becoming an outlaw...

You will have heard, I expect, of the character "Conan the Barbarian", the 1930s creation of the Texan Robert E. Howard (one amongst many of his creations, in fact) which mostly originally appeared in the pages of the pulp magazine *Weird Tales* until Howard's death by suicide, aged only 30, in 1936. Thereafter, Conan found later fame in reprints of the original (almost entirely short) stories Howard had written and new ones, some fashioned from fragments Howard left behind and others entirely new and written by others who were fans of the originals. These were often adorned with awesome covers created by the artist Frank Frazetta. In 1970 Marvel gained the rights to Conan and comics appeared for over two decades bearing the barbarian's name on the cover in several series. They were later joined and succeeded by Dark Horse comics in producing stories both old and new about the barbarian. In 1982 a movie was produced, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as Conan (in his breakout role), which further popularised the character. This would be followed by a much worse follow up film, *Conan the Destroyer*, also starring Schwarzenegger, and decades later, a third Conan film in 2011, this time starring Jason Momoa as the barbarian. (A third Schwarzenegger film, about Conan in later life when he

became a king, has long been promised but never appeared.) From small, humble beginnings in the mind of a man simply (and openly) seeking to make money from writing in the Texas of the Depression, strode a barbarian who would go on to become something of a media legend with many fans almost 100 years after his creation. I count myself as one of these, in fact, being a fan of Conan and his world for over 40 years – beginning with when I first saw the 1982 film.

Some background for the uninitiated. The character Conan (in Howard's scheme a Cimmerian, his version of an ancient Celt or Gael, in the Hyborian world and age he imagined between more modern history and the fall of a much more ancient Atlantis) is a northern barbarian who was born on a battlefield. His people were primitive and elemental. A typical trade for such people would be blacksmith and the geography of his land was grey hills and scattered forests such as found in the topography of the pre-industrial British Isles. Howard drew a map for his imaginary Hyborian world which placed Cimmeria to the north of the "civilised" kingdoms of the Hyborian nations (his version of ancient Europe) but below the northmen such as the Vanir and the Aesir of the northern, pre-Scandinavian lands. All of the peoples Howard imagined were distant ancestors of present day peoples (of Europe, Africa and Asia) and it is not very hard to work out who is supposed to be who.

Howard's stories of Conan are then essentially snippets (often quite short since most are only short stories and only one is in fact a full length novel) from this character's career and are set in no definitive order (although others have tried to produce one – not entirely successfully) in terms of their original writing and publication. So we find tales from when Conan was quite young and barely past being a youth and others after he has risen to become king of Aquilonia, the proudest of the Hyborian nations. One advantage

of this method of Howard's is that others coming after him have found it very easy to write their own stories of Conan and basically slot them into the numerous chronological gaps this method automatically created. There is, thus, no official biography of Conan but an ever increasing set of legends that allege his deeds, deeds which always seem to include beautiful women, foul necromancy and mythical and dangerous beasts that often seem summoned from the hellish outer dark. Conan is sword and sorcery fantasy and, in fact, Conan may be the character which invented the genre. For my purposes here, it seems clear that we have stumbled upon yet another wasteland where nothing is certain and we must keep our wits about us and take our lives in our hands.

Due to the way that Conan has come down to us, there are in fact several Conans and they don't always come off as the same. By this I mean to say that the original vision of Robert E. Howard is not necessarily kept intact by Conan's later storytellers. Many, for example, complain about the characterisation of Conan, vis-a-vis that created by Howard in the original stories, in John Milius' popular 1982 film about the character. Milius goes for a Conan who is hard as steel (and hardened like steel) in a Nietzschean vision of the character whose travails, if they do not kill him, make him stronger. (Milius puts this saying of Nietzsche's, from *Twilight of the Idols*, at the head of his film as its explicit theme.) If one knows anything of Milius, one knows this more properly reflects his own gun-toting libertarian philosophy but it is not entirely useless when applied to Conan and his film, which picks freely from Howard's stories in the service of its own story, and is a worthy introduction to the character on film even if many point out that the Conan of the books is both more verbose and more savvy than Schwarzenegger's acting allows. It should be clear, though, that the moral right to delineate who the character is rests firmly with Howard, his creator, and others deviate from that in the same way as casting Tom Hardy to play Mad Max resonates vis-a-vis the previous films starring Mel Gibson. Basically here

what we have, yet again, is sagas and we should take all the Conan material, whether original stories, other books, comic books or films, as just more stories about the same character and world. Each telling or retelling is slightly different and emphasises different things but that's simply a case of who is expanding the saga.

In order to explore Conan and his world more fully now – in the context of my queer apocalypse – I want to address a number of issues that seem apparent to me. Mostly these will be concerned only with the about two dozen stories Howard wrote (or prepared drafts for) before his death. In one case particularly I shall want to discuss the Milius film as another further significant entry into the Conan mythology. In doing so, we will learn that Conan is about a lot more than hot, exotic women, dangerous old wizards and fighting battles or wars against either armies or preternatural beasts.

1. Barbarism and Civilisation

Conan is a barbarian. Robert E. Howard consistently and deliberately makes that clear in every single story about Conan he writes. He clearly differentiates him from the civilised. (Ironically, he never seems to call the character “Conan the Barbarian” though. In Howard’s stories “Conan the Cimmerian” is much more in evidence – or simply “Conan”.) But what is a “barbarian”? I am quite familiar, from my education, with the ancient Greek sense of “barbarian” in which it means, quite simply, a foreigner, one who is not Greek and so is not educated in Greek ways, laws and morality. Of course, this then probably entails a measure of looking down on such a person – and there is much evidence of this in Howard’s Conan stories. Compared to the Hyborians who populate much of Howard’s Hyborian world (to be equated here with the civilised as the Greeks thought of themselves as compared with their barbarians), Conan is regarded (in the rhetoric of the

stories, unjustly) as an uneducated brute and a little understood foreigner from a cold, misty place to the far north. What this means in the stories, however, is that they contain an ongoing rhetoric in regard to barbarians and civilisation. And Howard is not simply for civilisation. In fact, Conan is used as a barbarian wedge AGAINST civilisation.

In the closing of the Conan story "Beyond the Black River", a thinly disguised story of a Western type (the Texan Howard also wrote some Westerns in his lifetime, a connection which aligns Conan with *Mad Max* in their common Western influence) in which Howard's savage "Picts" stand in for the natives of pre-Columbian America and Conan and the Aquilonians he is then working for are the more civilised cowboys seeking to conquer and acquire territory, Howard writes the following:

"Barbarism is the natural state of Mankind... Civilization is unnatural. It is a whim of circumstance. And barbarism must always ultimately triumph."

Now although these words, which literally end the tale of expanding civilisation bumping up against the more barbarian natives in "Beyond the Black River", are placed on the lips of one of Conan's more civilised companions in that story, many commentators have argued, not unconvincingly in the light of Howard's correspondence with people like H.P. Lovecraft on such points, that these are the genuine sentiments of Howard himself. For example, Frank Coffey, in his essay "Barbarism Ascendant" in the academic collection of essays on Conan titled *Conan Meets the Academy*, tells us that:

"It has been noted by many Howard scholars and researchers, both academic and private, that one of the dominant themes presented throughout his literary corpus is that of Barbarism as the natural human condition, with the many historical cycles of great

civilizations and any attempts to establish a lasting order in the face of chaos always and ultimately futile."

Referring to Don Herron's book on Conan, *The Dark Barbarian* (which references other contemporaneous "savages" in the characters of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan and Rudyard Kipling's Mowgli), Coffey continues:

"Burroughs' Tarzan is a respectable pillar of civilization as an English lord, and preserves the twentieth-century American sense of the status quo even when venturing naked in time-lost cities and primeval forests.... In Howard the unquiet surge of barbarism ever threatens to sweep the works of civilization under, the status quo is at best shaky — even when Howard's barbarians put themselves on the thrones of the ruling class. The Howardian mood and philosophy is not simply barbaric, it is a dark barbarism, a pessimistic view that holds the accomplishments of society of little account in the face of mankind's darker nature."

Coffey in fact reproduces some of Howard's literary correspondence with his fellow author, Lovecraft, and it will be useful to review some of this here to get a further handle on Howard's appreciation of "barbarism" versus "civilisation" in his own words. Howard writes:

"For myself, if I should be suddenly confronted with the prospect of being transported back through the centuries into a former age, with the option of living where I wished, I would naturally select the most civilized country possible. That would be necessary, for I have always led a peaceful, sheltered life, and would be unable to cope with conditions of barbarism. Thus, for my own safety, I would select Egypt rather than Syria, to which

otherwise my instincts would lead me; I would choose Greece rather than Spain or Thrace; Rome rather than Gaul, Britain or Germany. As a matter of personal necessity I would seek to adapt myself to the most protected and civilized society possible, would conform to their laws and codes of conduct, and if necessary, fight with them against the ruder races of my own blood.

On the other hand, if I were to be reborn in some earlier age and grow up knowing no other life or environment than that, I would choose to be born in a hut among the hills of western Ireland, the forests of Germany or the steppes of Southern Russia; to grow up hard and lean and wolfish, worshipping barbarian gods and living the hard barren life of a barbarian — which is, to the barbarian who has never tasted anything else — neither hard nor barren."

After an interlude, in which Lovecraft no doubt interrogates Howard's view, the latter adds:

"I didn't say that barbarism was superior to civilization. For the world as a whole, civilization even in decaying form, is undoubtedly better for people as a whole. I have no idyllic [sic] view of barbarism — as near as I can learn it's a grim, bloody, ferocious and loveless condition...

I have no patience with the depiction of the barbarian of any race as a stately, god-like child of Nature, endowed with strange wisdom and speaking in measured and sonorous phrases. Bah! My conception of a barbarian is very different. He had neither stability nor undue dignity. He was ferocious, brutal and frequently squalid. He was haunted by dim and shadowy fears; he committed horrible crimes for strange monstrous reasons. As a race he hardly ever exhibited the steadfast courage often shown by civilized men. He was childish

and terrible in his wrath, bloody and treacherous. As an individual he lived under the shadow of the war-chief and the shaman, each of whom might bring him to a bloody end because of a whim, a dream, a leaf floating on the wind. His religion was generally one of dooms and shadows, his gods were awful and abominable....

His life was often a bondage of tambus [sic], sharp sword-edges, between which he walked shuddering. He had no mental freedom, as civilized man understands it, and very little personal freedom, being bound to his clan, his tribe, his chief.... But he was lithe and strong as a panther, and the full joy of strenuous physical exertion was his. The day and the night were his book, wherein he read of all things that run or walk or crawl or fly."

He then concludes:

"I've never seen anyone who had any sympathy whatever with my point of view, nor do I want any. I'm not ashamed of it. I would not choose to plunge into such a life now; it would be the sheerest of hells to me, unfitted as I am for such an existence. But I do say that if I had the choice of another existence, to be born into it and raised in it, knowing no other, I'd choose such an existence as I've just sought to depict. There's no question of the relative merits of barbarism and civilization here involved. It's just my own personal opinion and choice."

What is revealed here is some lingering sense that Howard saw some kind of elemental authenticity in barbarism that was extinguished in civilisation. And that is certainly how he writes of Conan. The character, in fact, we may see as Howard imagining himself a barbarian. It's fantasy very personal to Howard himself. He is Conan and living out a savage fantasy of life born in a Celtic setting under the auspices of an ethos in which

civilisation can never last for long and so is, once more and over and over, swallowed up by the barbarians who are never quite destroyed because they possess an elemental vitality the more artificial civilisation can never completely do away with. Barbarism, simply put, is the more natural thing – and nature never completely goes away (nor should it!) but constantly fights for its own, self-organised and self-organising, survival. This, I believe, is actually its primary appeal to readers too. Conan has something autonomous, authentic and vital which civilisation forces people to do away with in order to be brought within its fold. With Conan you get unvarnished reality rather than civilisation's artificial derivation of such a thing. As a consequence, academics such as Coffey can write of "Howard's theme of the unstoppable ascent of barbarism over civilization". So:

"Civilizations rise up and seek to protect and perpetuate themselves. There are walls of protection and gates that are barred against chaos. But Howard sees the barbarians always ready to invade and conquer. The walls will not hold forever and the gates will, eventually and inevitably, be broken wide."

Conan is Howard's symbol for this, a character who wanders through civilised lands barely understanding their ways but never needing to for, despite their apparent education and organisation, their laws and morality, they can never stub out this barbarian foreign object in their midst. In fact, they break trying to do so.

In another essay from the same book, this time Daniel Weiss' "Robert E. Howard's Barbarian and the Western", which explicitly addresses the influence of the Western genre on the tales of Conan, we find similar ideas, if this time attached to the peculiarly American genre of the "Western", a genre in which, quite explicitly, self-assumedly

civilised (white!) men try to make their way in the wilderness (let the reader understand: wasteland) where they find themselves rubbing up against (inevitably darker skinned) “barbarians” of more indigenous kinds. (The afore-mentioned Conan story “Beyond the Black River” – which Weiss will reference in some detail in his essay – is little more than this as a context and an example of cultural and historical intertextuality.) An example from Weiss’ essay of this barbarian/civilised topic is his discussion of Conan’s morality which, unlike a civilised version of the same, is his own autonomy in context (as a barbarian often supplanted into a culture not his own – I will come onto this specifically soon) and makes him an outlaw by default. (The Conan stories themselves are often revolving stories of Conan as outlaw, thief, pirate, mercenary, renegade, etc.)

For example, in one of the most famous Conan stories, “Queen of the Black Coast” (which features the character Bêlit, the referenced queen, a partial inspiration for the character Valeria in the 1982 film), we find at the opening of the story that Conan is charging for the harbour on a horse and being chased by the law since he has killed some army officer who outraged his own “primitive morality” by trying to coerce the woman of a friend. Being arrested and presented before a court, Conan soon becomes bored and confused by this civilised justice and, at a basic level, not understanding what or why it should have any authority over him anyway, he grabs for his sword, lops off a few heads, and makes for the harbour on the stolen chief constable’s horse. Not only does this inform us that, in the mind of Howard, barbarians are strangers to the logic of civilisation, but it tells us that they have their own codes too – codes which civilisation, for all its authority and ability to act against others, does not, and perhaps cannot, dissolve.

Thus, we are informed that, in the words of Weiss: “Conan stands outside the law in whatever country he occupies. He makes his own law, but abides by a strict code of

fairness and justice.” But this is his law, a natural law, a law not adjudicated by, or for, others. Often this relates to the treatment of women (who are regularly outraged in Conan’s world – but never by him) but not only so. More importantly, that Conan has his own ethics and acts according to his own rules puts those of civilisation in question. Conan has an autonomy of desire (not merely sexual) that begs the reader to ask if civilisation is quite as sound on its moral foundations as it would like you to think it is. So Weiss again:

“Conan stands quite markedly against the back-drop of outlaws, thieves, and murderers on one hand, and deceitful, transgressive and imperialistic governmental/national institutions on the other. Most often, soldiers are portrayed as weak and self serving and governments are characterized as endemically oppressive. Like the western hero, Conan is forced to break the law because the institutions and their agents are immoral and self-serving.”

Here we get at something about Howard’s depiction of civilisation vis-a-vis barbarism: Howard seems to see the latter as more straightforward, more authentic, more honest (if without also being any less brutal or visceral or consequential). Civilisation, at least in his depictions of it in Conan stories, is deceitful, corrupt, customary, exploitative, arbitrary, either full of sheep who never think for themselves and who simply want a quiet life or those on the make at someone else’s expense. (One, of course, requires the other.) Civilisation is populated by the dominating and the mass happy to be dominated so long as they can be left in relative peace. They want a static normality to live in where nothing ever changes and their lives just play out without incident. Of course, in both the Western or the sword and sorcery fantasy, we know that this is never going to happen. In both cases trouble always comes to town or our protagonist walks into it and has to get themselves out of it. Thus, one thing that Howard says about barbarism as against

civilisation in and through the character of Conan is that, as a barbarian, Conan is a man possessed of the freedom, and logic, of adventure. His life (not least is this shown in Howard's chosen method of simply writing random, unconnected stories about Conan as separate incidents) is carefree and without set course. Thus, in the afore-mentioned "Queen of the Black Coast", Conan can proclaim a kind of barbarian creed: "I live, I burn with life, I love, I slay, and am content."

Winter Elliott, again in the same book, this time in his essay "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Women: Gender Dynamics in the Hyborian World" (the best essay in the book), takes yet another tack on this civilisation vs barbarism issue. Pointing out that, in Howard's work, civilisation and culture are often very male coded, this "others", a postcolonial term (and to some degree feminises), Conan who is – undeniably – not of civilisation. Civilisation is the (masculine) authority, the assumedly dominant one, in these stories and it is always trying to discipline or punish Conan and keep him subservient (a notable position of women in many of the Conan stories, with a couple of notable exceptions which I shall discuss separately below). But who is the "real man" here: civilisation or the barbarian? Elliott describes this in the stories as a matter of conflict:

"throughout Howard's canon, Conan's status as a barbarian, a primitive, vital man, forces him into both conflict and contrast with the softer, more deceptive men of civilization. Over and over, Howard stresses Conan's primal inclinations and a lack of polish that extends to his usual absence of overly complicated clothing (why dress for success when a loincloth will do?). Conan's body, his mind, and his behaviors are shaped by his barbarian nature. In fact, that barbarian identity constitutes a pursuit of absolute freedom at odds with the restrictions and customs of any human society. Yet, it is not the barbarian world in which Conan often travels, and, as a mature adult, finds himself a ruler. It is the civilized world,

the very environment that Conan doubts, questions, and frequently condemns. Ironically, it is also this civilized world that defines Conan; he is almost as often described by what he is not as what he is. In his more mature years, this world even restricts and confines Conan's behaviors.

Consequently, Conan experiences a nearly constant tension between his needs as an independent, free-thinking barbarian and the desires of a society that prefers both structure and conformity."

Such tensions and conflicts are habitually described in the stories by Howard with reference to Conan's character and physicality. He is described animalistically, instinctually, and with reference to nature and its elemental reality. One might almost say he is given nature to civilisation's arbitrary and artificial creation of culture. He is visceral purity refusing to be contaminated by civilisation's plastic impurities. So Elliott comments:

"Conan then defines his view of cities, seeing them as 'crooked streets and walled lairs where men plotted to betray humanity'. If there is purity in Conan's association with the animal world, civilization, especially in cities, lacks an honesty that Howard seems to see as both brutal — wild animals kill of necessity — but also without malice. In contrast, men in cities have lost their candid savagery and replaced it with deceit and corruption. Indeed, in the story 'Queen of the Black Coast,' Conan complains that 'though I've spent considerable time among you civilized peoples, your ways are still beyond my comprehension'. By 'ways,' Conan means the legal system and laws that privilege 'duty to the state' over loyalties to friends. For Conan, such duplicity holds little appeal.

Clearly, Howard juxtaposes Conan's barbarian nature with the civilized world, finding appeal in Conan's association with a wild undiluted by 'refined' customs."

Conan, Elliott comments later in his essay:

"seeks an extreme life, extreme in the sense that he will fulfill his own desires even at the expense of so-called civilized customs. Conan wants what he wants, and the need to kill to attain the object of his desire presents no barrier..."

So Conan's relationship with cities depends upon an uneasy mix of need and animosity. But Conan, unlike many other inhabitants of his world, is free to define the parameters of that association himself. Just as Conan's body establishes his basic nature as both primal and animalistic, it also literally gives him the strength to be truly free, in the sense that he is not confined by any social boundaries."

Of course, we should not let an opportunity to discuss civilisation versus "barbarism" pass us by in more modern context as we discuss it in the context of Conan. Indeed, the argument here is that, in writing Conan this way, Howard was not even doing that himself but was actually writing his own personal commentary on the subject. Howard, in fact, was seemingly making a point by having the "to the point" primal barbarian who wants what he wants and goes where he goes stride autonomously and violently across relatively civilised lands. He was bringing one into the context of the other and comparing and contrasting in such a way as the alert reader might see this, stop and think. There are others who have done this too in much more contemporary context and with an even harsher verdict on civilisation than Howard, a son of civilisation, could have himself countenanced (if perhaps not also his barbarian, Conan). One of these is the

contemporary “anti-civilisationalist” (perhaps the best description for him as describing him as either an anarchist or primitivist is problematic), John Zerzan, who regards “civilisation” whole and entire as a disaster for humanity (and its wider environment), a necessarily coercive and controlling phenomenon most explicitly described as a matter of “domestication”. (In the context of Conan we may note here that one does not domesticate barbarians! And we can expect them very much to resist such domestication. As we will see, Zerzan imagines that even if we are not of Cimmerian heritage we should be no less resistant to being domesticated.)

Zerzan has been publishing books regularly for several decades on why civilisation is just about the worst thing that could have ever happened to us – and he was writing essays even before that. One book that collects fifteen of these together that I am going to take as my main text on Zerzan’s views here is his 2018 collection *A People’s History of Civilization*. Zerzan himself says of this book in the introduction that it could alternatively have been titled *Contributions Toward a History of Civilization in the West—mainly Europe—From an Anti-Civilization Perspective* and this should give readers a clue as to where Zerzan is coming from. Zerzan, to make things clear before we dig in, is a consistent and virulent critic of the very idea, let alone the practice, of “civilisation” as it has unfolded historically in the history of the planet we live on (which, to be equally clear, is NOT “our planet”). My own researches over several years, which you can see laid out in my previous books, give me a good deal of sympathy with Zerzan’s general view if not with every detail or nuance of it (in which it is discovered that I actually have many, several and consistent disagreements with him too). Zerzan, then, is not someone I blindly follow or even follow at all. He simply says some pertinent things about civilisation.

These pertinent things begin in the first chapter of this book which details where human beings went wrong: they went wrong when they settled down and started domesticating everything – otherwise known as agriculture. In fact, Zerzan equates agriculture with the desire to domesticate pure and simple and applied generally to EVERYTHING. Zerzan says: “The move from forager to farmer, the move to domestication of plants and animals—and ourselves—was the most deeply qualitative shift in the history of our species. It changed everything and continues to do so.” What Zerzan sees here is a new logic of the control of everything in total, the desire to control in a world in which, formerly, human beings, and all other life, had simply wandered where it wanted to or where it could. There was no tending to the environment, no large scale attempt to set or fix it a certain way. Human beings simply culled nature’s bounty as it was given and were happy to leave it at that. But, at some point, they stopped doing that (including the moving about called foraging that anthropologists and others suggest was our prehistoric reality) and, if in fits and starts and in uneven ways as Graeber and Wengrow suggest in their *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, they became people who kept animals, ploughed fields, built structures and created settlements and even walled cities. This, Zerzan essentially argues, the creating of mass-dwelling civility, was the beginning of the end because it introduced and manifested the idea of coercing and controlling everything, of domesticating the whole of human experience and relation, bringing non-human life under its control.

So “Control emerged as the defining principle” and “Agriculture is the birth of production, complete with its essential features and deformation of life and consciousness.” Now nothing can be “wild” for everything must be “tame” (and tamed). Life itself is altered in its course, interfered with at a basic level. Civilisation’s deliberation becomes that which cannot, which must not, be stopped. It is that which seeks to make standardised and

predictable and universal (a monoculture) where once there was only the natural diversity of what can happen, happening. It is to determine that human beings will decide how the world works and that they will attempt to artificially decide and determine its course. This domestication of other life for human purposes is, as Zerzan sees, also to domesticate and control humanity itself. Civilisation is then the decision to deliberately curtail life's very own freedom and self-organisation (as we see Conan experiences in the stories about him over and over again). "Time" and "history" are invented for now everything must be labelled and put in its place. With agriculture and domestication comes the logic of enclosure (the early cities were walled cities) and control and classification. Now things must be specific things and the world requires an imposed order rather than being left to its own self-organising devices. Zerzan remarks that "not only would industrial society be impossible without time schedules, the end of agriculture (basis of all production) would be the end of historical time."

Language and symbolism is implicated in this for Zerzan (that is, how we even think, speak and communicate). He writes:

"Representation begins with language, a means of reining in desire. By displacing autonomous images with verbal symbols, life is reduced and brought under strict control; all direct, unmediated experience is subsumed by that supreme mode of symbolic expression. Language cuts up and organizes reality... and this segmentation of nature, an aspect of grammar, sets the stage for agriculture. Julian Jaynes, in fact, concluded that the new linguistic mentality led very directly to agriculture. Unquestionably, the crystallization of language into writing, called forth mainly by the need for record-keeping of agricultural transactions, is the signal that civilization has definitively begun."

One of the big problems here in imagining this is that we have to put ourselves in a position we are not in and which we have not been in for thousands of years. We know, for example, that human beings are evolved creatures but this very fact means that what works now, what we became, is not what worked before – and so what we used to be. Evolution is change. So, as Zerzan so pertinently remarks:

"In the non-commodified, egalitarian hunter-gatherer ethos, the basis of which (as has so often been remarked) was sharing, number was not wanted. There was no ground for the urge to quantify, no reason to divide what was whole. Not until the domestication of animals and plants did this cultural concept fully emerge. Two of number's seminal figures testify clearly to its alliance with separateness and property: Pythagoras, center of a highly influential religious cult of number, and Euclid, father of mathematics and science, whose geometry originated to measure fields for reasons of ownership, taxation and slave labor. One of civilization's early forms, chieftainship, entails a linear rank order in which each member is assigned an exact numerical place. Soon, following the anti-natural linearity of plow culture, the inflexible 90-degree gridiron plan of even earliest cities appeared. Their insistent regularity constitutes in itself a repressive ideology. Culture, now numberized, becomes more firmly bounded and lifeless."

What Zerzan is beginning to enunciate here is that intellectual change is not untied from organisational change. Both in fact go together. One has consequences for the other. How we live, how we communicate, what we come to know, or want to know, is all related. Zerzan even links the development of art to this and describes its relationship to the domesticating agricultural nature of the new human life as "a means to interpret and subdue reality, to rationalize nature". Have you ever looked at a photo of a prehistoric cave painting and seen not merely primitive art but earlier humans setting out how things

SHOULD be organised and are being rationalised? Art itself, in fact, can be conceptualised as a window into how the world is seen and related to itself. It is an organising activity even as agriculture is, another facet of control and domestication. Art imagines the world but, in doing so, also sets it in stone, puts it under some classification and form of control.

Zerzan, in fact, subsumes art under the rubric “symbolisation” and so ties it together with time, language and number as aspects of the domesticating mentality which also encompasses agriculture at the material level. He imagines “autonomy” as what came before domestication and he thinks “the social” preceded this new reality of symbolism. But in both “domestication” and “symbolism” what we get is the “imposition of arbitrary forms” (as Nietzsche saw in his short essay “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense” where language is a pragmatic tool in the hands of humans making life useful *for themselves*). “Culture”, in this respect, “is governed by the imperative of reforming and subordinating nature”. Reality is then no longer the “what happens, happening”. What happens must be what we require to happen and must do so predictably and even within a useful fiction of our making as reality becomes metaphysical. Wilderness must be built out, *civilis* must be built in. A symbolic world must replace a world of random, diverse actuality. (The civilised, policed Hyborian world must replace Conan’s world of random adventures and autonomous desires.) One must become alienated from primitive, if authentic, freedom and be integrated into this new, artificially meaningful, life.

It is consequently hard to overemphasise how large and consequential the change from hunter-gathering to becoming agriculturalists was and still is. Our world could simply not exist in every single one of its aspects unless this had happened. But it was not a turn for the better but very much for the worse. It was a completely different way of life. Hunter-gatherers could not, could never, have done what agricultural humanity went on to do in

and through its “civilising”. There is a direct line from domesticating animals, farming fields and building settlements to nuclear power stations irradiating their surroundings, sewage in rivers and seas, and microplastics in everything. Hunter-gatherers, who refused the drudgery of work for a life many anthropologists agree was largely leisure, could never have done any of that. They would never have needed or wanted to. Even today anthropologists observe of the few still remaining hunter-gatherer tribes that “No group on earth has more leisure time than hunters and gatherers, who spend it primarily on games, conversation and relaxing.” This is because their lives are, by our standards, terribly simple and with an almost complete lack of control over the environment. Their lives are 180 degrees from our own. This hunting and gathering lifestyle lasted among humans for tens of thousands of years, far longer than a recognisably agricultural age has so far existed, but without any of the latter’s obviously attendant problems (such as impending mass extinction, implicit coercion of the masses to even make it work and a vast division between rich and poor). These problems could also never have occurred in a hunter-gathering world but are consequent upon an agricultural, domesticated one.

A further impetus to this domesticating world is found in religion. Zerzan says: “Evidence of the urge to impose order or subjugate is found in the coercive rites and uncleanness taboos of incipient religion. The eventual subduing of the world that is agriculture has at least some of its basis where ambiguous behavior is ruled out, purity and defilement defined and enforced.” Religion, not least in the roles it requires in its existence and administration, sets up hierarchy (literally meaning “rule by priests”) and inequality. Religious cults require payments or taxes to keep them going. Such cults also act as something which legitimates various kinds of existence and culture at the expense of others, not least inasmuch as it becomes a moral arbiter. It then gains and wields power over communities. The life of that community then becomes mediated through various

rituals which gather communal meaning and become thought of as necessary (think of things like marriage or funerals). Divisions of reality such as the sacred and the profane are invented. Nature and religion become fused as nature is “culturised” as in when, as Zerzan reports, “Lévi-Strauss defined religion as the anthropomorphism of nature”. A material domestication of nature needs and finds an intellectual domestication of reality and vice versa.

With agricultural and other forms of domestication we get “production”, we get “work”, we get “labour”, we get “capital”, “property”, “profit” and “loss”. We get the notion, for the first time, that something can be “mine” and “not yours”. When things become products they can be bought and sold. The world becomes a place of instrumental things rather than common, naturally diverse and autonomous inter-relating existences. The relationship of the sexes, and even that there are sexes, becomes classified and defined. Zerzan says that “Male violence toward women originated with agriculture, which transmuted women into beasts of burden and breeders of children.” Cities become places that suck in and use up resources from their surrounding environments. As civilisation grows, so it needs more and more to keep it (and its now rapidly expanding population) going. Anyone should be able to see that that is not a relationship that can continually go on forever. Resources are finite even if the desire for them is not. More and more work is required to keep this civilisational system going (and growing) whereas work, in the pre-civilisational past, was not anything that even existed.

As civilisation advances, work becomes the symbol that you are even a proper member of society and those not working are regarded as a sponging or criminal underclass whereas not working simply used to be an eminently normal way of life. Civilisation becomes a great arbitrary engine for chewing up and spitting out natural resources now thought of

only as things with defined or definable uses, as “product”. Civilisation’s task is to turn nature into things it can use (and, sooner or later, buy and sell and profit from). Over time this produces “gradations of labour and social classes”. Civilisation becomes a man-made, artificial prison for the earth and everything in it and lives are regarded as something to be used as a resource or otherwise discarded, their naturally occurring richness and diversity, something that could only ever be produced by uninhibited wildness, terminally interrupted, reduced and destroyed. For evidence of this simply study the geography of the earth and how civilised human activity has changed it. Increasing areas that once teemed with life are now deserts and wastelands. For the fact is that intensive agriculture actually destroys life whilst vastly reducing the nutrition available in the average diet. Hunter-gatherers had far more diverse diets than those who transitioned to agriculture did and still do. And all this whilst creating environments and habitats where plagues and diseases could thrive, whilst alienating ourselves from the very nature that we are a part of in the process and whilst obligating ourselves to buy the products of fewer and fewer multi-national corporations who devour the earth for private profit whilst making themselves the unavoidable means of our survival.

But this is not all for, as Zerzan’s second chapter declares, “civilisation *is* patriarchy”. Here his first sentence is that “civilization, very fundamentally, is the history of the domination of nature and of women” (my earlier ecofeminist sources when discussing *Mad Max* would agree). It is not a coincidence that women’s voices are often almost completely absent from the history, philosophy and culture of civilisation. Nature, of course, has no voice at all. But this means that what we have done and what it has meant has almost always been up to men to decide. And it has been the history, culture and philosophy of men as a consequence. Civilisation is consequently a male phenomenon (as one of my academic commentators argued of the civilisation in Conan’s world) and all that is not civilised is

other and implicitly feminised. Thus, we get these words from Ursula K. Le Guin, quoted by Zerzan:

"Civilized Man says: I am Self, I am Master, all the rest is other—outside, below, underneath, subservient. I own, I use, I explore, I exploit, I control. What I do is what matters. What I want is what matter is for. I am that I am, and the rest is women and wilderness, to be used as I see fit."

The point here of course, to differentiate it from a barbarous creed more amenable to a Conan-like figure, is that this is systematic, programmatic, a set of forced human relations rather than the attitude of a lone wanderer. It sets up borders, boundaries and structures. It enforces an order and punishes transgressors. It has institutions which mediate and police life itself. Although Zerzan disdains the notion of pre-civilisational matriarchies (much of his evidence seems prior to that I reviewed, with favour, in a previous book of my own), he recognises that there was certainly a time when women were much more autonomous than they became. Foraging societies are noted amongst anthropologists for their need for egalitarianism in order to make them work and for their consequent openness and interactive inter-relatedness, in which things like marriage can simply be based on who you share a bed with. (Leaving one bed and starting to share another is to then be regarded as a change of allegiances.) Things are much more flexible because less policed and fit the overall social situation. But, as has also been observed, such societies "exert little or no control over women's bodies or those of their children, making no fetish of virginity or chastity, and making no demands of women's sexual exclusivity." I covered this too in a previous book, based on the work of Ryan and Jetha in their book *Sex At Dawn*.

The fact is the mentality of domestication, material and intellectual, changed human relations and it changed how we understood human relations. Human relations, by the way, are not things that have to be a certain way and neither do they follow a worldwide universal pattern (presuming they are left to organise themselves). They are capable of multiple configurations according to their functions and purposes. And, depending on what they are, they have varying effects too. So when Zerzan observes that “There is a fundamental division of social existence according to gender, and an obvious hierarchy to this divide” this is not because the way things are is the way things have to be: it is because they have been made that way – and could be unmade or remade as people themselves decide. Even in having “men and women”, for example, one can have and create a basic dominant and subdominant set of relations. But one does not need to classify people in general as men and women, much less make one class dominant over the other. This, for example, is clearly the case in Conan and much of Conan’s imagined chivalry is in how he treats women but civilised men do not. Here it is notable, I think, that the foundational basis of patriarchy in domesticated relations is the family. In Howard’s Conan his family are presumed dead and they exert no influence over him. He is family free. (Something Howard was not. He committed suicide so as not to witness his mother’s own impending death, something he apparently could not bear to go through.) Here something Zerzan then says seems pertinent: “In kinship is hierarchy”. But will this be societally imposed or autonomously chosen? Therein lies a distinction, perhaps, between civilisation and barbarism (and certainly between civilisation and anarchy). It is a matter of an organisation of relations, symbolic as well as material. And it tells us who we are, to whom we owe allegiances, etc. It organises our world. If one goes from a world of no hierarchy to gendered hierarchy, patriarchy, it literally changes your world (as even Gayle Rubin noted in her first notable essay “The Traffic in Women” where “the world-historical defeat of women occurred with the origins of culture”). Thus, it is as well to note that:

"Nothing in nature explains the sexual division of labor, nor such institutions as marriage, conjugality or paternal filiation. All are imposed on women by constraint, all are therefore facts of civilization which must be explained, not used as explanations."

Civilisation as domestication is then the imposition of a prison system of relations (Zerzan's chapter on cities is titled "The City and Its Inmates") upon everyone across society in multiple intersecting ways. Culture, religion, work, gender, family, politics – even language, thought and communication – all are implicated in what is meant to be a totalising system of control and the denial of more primitive, more barbarous, freedoms. This is, if in my terms via Zerzan's logic, the verdict of more scholarly respectable figures like Davids Graeber and Wengrow in their notable book in this area (already referenced above), *The Dawn Of Everything*, too. Their view is that civilisation has denied modern humans more primitive freedoms – the freedom to move about at will, the freedom to say no to authority, the freedom to create relationships and cultures of one's own that are free from outside interference. These freedoms, we may note, are freedoms Conan would (and does) cherish in the stories told about him. His very barbarity is, in some respects, defined by his value of such freedoms. Civilisation, in this respect, is then the grand organisation of human life and experience, material AND immaterial, to define the boundaries of acceptability and even to say that there are boundaries (where "barbarians" would know either none or more ad hoc ones that are, importantly, of their own design and purpose). But is that good? Or should we be choosing barbarity instead?

Here an associated thought occurs. Here we are discussing "civilisation or barbarism". Another famous saying has it that the choice is "socialism or barbarism" and, in that formulation, "socialism" takes the place (pretty much one for one) of what is thought really civilised. But have those who proffer these choices, assuming civilisation and

socialism as the appropriately superior terms, got this right and thought this through? Howard's Conan gives us pause for thought even as more modern commentators pile up the pressure against these imagined superior terms. How could civilisation be superior to barbarism when the latter could never enslave a planet nor poison a world? How could civilisation be superior to barbarism when it is the systematic control and coercion of all life, as well as its instrumentalisation as resources, when the alternative is the lack of these things and the refusal even to be put under control and made subservient to imposed duties like duty to a state? "Civilisation" might, conceivably, be better if what you value is convenience, efficiency and their ability to put in front of you something you want. Want strawberries out of season flown in from half way across the world? Want some entirely superfluous electronic convenience? Civilisation has you covered. The problem, however, is that people have to give up those freedoms I spoke of previously - like freedom to go where you like, freedom to tell authority to take a running jump and freedom to build your own culture and relationships - as a consequence. Civilisation, as fundamentally a system of relations that desires total control, demands everything and all of you, including every relationship. It will not allow any dilution of your attention or commitment. It is all civilisation all the time, from civilisation's point of view, or there is going to be a problem. When you tie relationships together in civilisation's absolute way, that's it. That's what you have. That's the enclosure you create. And you will suffer or benefit as civilisation can provide in either case after that. The basic equation I am making here, however, is that civilisation COSTS MORE THAN IT IS WORTH. IT COSTS THE EARTH.

I am not saying here that this is Robert E. Howard's point of view, however. (It is much closer to Zerzan's whereas Conan himself would have probably just not seen the point in civilisation at all since the freedoms he had in his "barbarity" were non-negotiable to him, born of a logic that refuses the bargain civilisation imagines to present.) In fact, I quoted

some of Howard's own words on this above which are probably closer to the mark on his views. But, in the world he presents in his Conan stories, barbarism, and the wild freedoms that constitute it, are a clear and present danger, a threat, to civilisation's artificially enclosed and domesticating ways. There is the sense that civilisation (not unrealistically under Zerzan's interpretive gaze) is fighting against the wild and unrestricted barbarity of nature to even exist – and that it is a fight in which one has the freedom, diversity and simple will, the vitality, to always outlast the other. (Compare Conan's characterisation here.) In many respects, then, the real battle in Conan stories is the civilisation vs barbarism battle – with Conan fighting on the latter side. And with the more than sneaking suspicion that barbarism must always win in the end.

This is very interesting from an anarchistic point of view for barbarism here is that which is most close to anarchy. This, however (as must be understood), is not a lack of order with civilisation instead lyingly pushed forward as the face of an order it is not since it is actually only domesticating coercion. It is, to the contrary, a natural order, an uncoerced order, a self-organising, autonomous order of things and their natural relations. It is agency, autonomy and free association or, at the very least, a lack of legalised, policed, state-responsible, always-under-the-watch-of-a-third-party existence. It is, in fact, in its barbarousness, pretty much how I have previously described anarchy as a background situation or context to life itself. Perhaps that is one reason why Conan has always appealed to me so much. "Barbarism" here, in the Conan stories, is authenticity and honesty and direct action, consciously anarchist things according to a social egoism I have previously described as anarchy (if also sometimes including a brutality and inescapable viscosity to be sure). But it is not deception, coercion, systematic exploitation, the enslavement of the poor by the rich, constant surveillance or the institutionalisation of life itself imagined as a closed system of domesticated relations as civilisation is. It is not

inauthentic duplicity and “the law says this must be so” and a will to control and coerce on a grand scale. In barbarism freedom is something you take and don’t beg for just like in anarchy (or piracy). Much less is it something that is someone else’s gift to give. There are no “rights” in barbarism but then a barbarian would never understand why their ability to do something, or not, was to be decided by somebody else, much less in the abstract, in the first place. Just like an anarchist.

The barbarian, then, has that “autonomy of desire” I spoke to before under the rubric of “queer”. And its exactly that a male-dominated and male-coded, heteronormative, legalistic, civilisation only wants to take away from you. Civilisation, as Howard has described it in Conan stories and Zerzan describes it in lived reality and history, is something anti-queer. It is also something anti-anarchist in as much as agency, autonomy and freedom of association are regarded by it as contrary to its interests. Conan is then a queer, anarchist champion (one civilisation constantly tries to bring under its power) inasmuch as he stands for direct action and autonomy of desire and the simple will to say “No” to civilisation and then to actively defy it (to the death if he must) in the carrying out of his desires.

These, in fact, can now be described (and positively so) as barbarian traits. Civilisation is imprisonment and the will to imprison and barbarism is freedom and the will to be free. Acting for yourself (yourselves) is now revealed as barbarous because civilisation has written all the dictionaries and determined all the words. The barbarian is the bad because she doesn’t do as she is told not because she is stupid or lesser. (In fact, Conan is presented as anything but stupid or less. The thing is, his intelligence and presence is of a different kind and that’s the problem from the civilised point of view.) The “civilisation vs barbarism” question is then about so much more than simple societal organisation or

about a facile comparison of imagined benefits or conveniences. For, as we saw in Zerzan's analysis, that question is actually about all of life and existence itself. Its about how we live, how we think, how we communicate, what we want, what we value, what we desire, what counts and what matters. It is about the fundamental context in which we exist. It is about whether we want to live within enclosed and coerced prison walls (which will no doubt be presented as safety and security by its promoters who want to force us into relations with them in pre-determined ways) or, instead, take our chances in the relative freedom of the outside where our lives and our existences are up to us. In saying this, however, we must always remember that it is about ALL THE CONSEQUENCES of those two ways as well, what they deliver and how they turn out, WHAT THEY COST. Taking all that into account (as civilisationists can never honestly do), queer anarchy chooses barbarism for its authenticity demands its liberty and its autonomy, its ability to tell its own story and form its own culture and wander where it will and form its own kinship groups, as of first importance. And that is the barbarian way, not the civilised way.

2. The Other, Sexuality, and Fetishising the Body

It will be lost on no one reading Conan that it is full of bodies (in at least two ways). As one reads the stories, a lot of these bodies become dead ones. Swords and sorcery both tend to have these effects. But there are living bodies too. Most usually these are either the curvaceous and voluptuous bodies of women or the viscerally powerful bodies of men (with Conan's own body being the perennial example of the latter and his consorts or conquests being examples of the former). Conan stories, in fact, are constant examples of a cult of physical perfection in which the perfect woman is sexually desirable in an aesthetically pre-determined way (for example, she is almost certainly white, Conan making it clear in at least one story that black women are not his gold standard) and the

perfect man is visibly strong and powerful with corded thews of iron (like Achilles or Heracles would be in Greek myth). In one way, then, Conan is very materially man, masculine, even the exemplar of man incarnate (referring back to a previous discussion, we may call him the perfect example of *andreia*), but this is in contrast to his status as “other” as an outsider to civilisation (which, as has been already suggested, is itself male-coded). Switching to the notion of Conan’s body as an elemental, animalised body (he is often described as a wolf or wolfish, for example), Conan’s very identification with nature (and its mysterious physical power which is where his masculinity finds meaning when masculinised civilisation others him as a character) is used antagonistically as a foil for the artificially created power of civilisation. Civilisation wishes to constrain and control nature and physical power and, inasmuch as Conan is the virile symbol of this, within his story world he must be combatted by it.

Conan’s physical masculinity, monstrously evident in the repeated physical descriptions of him from story to story (that it is “monstrous” is relevant since he must often fight actual monsters), becomes a theme for Winter Elliott in his essay which I referenced above. For him, it is his body and its identification with nature, which actually sets him apart from the physically less impressive bodies of civilised men. In fact, for Elliott it questions humanity itself and whether Conan, the barbarian, belongs with the animals or the humans. He writes:

“Significantly, the very first Conan story, ‘The Phoenix on the Sword,’ establishes Conan as a man who doesn’t quite belong in a city, but can’t escape it, at least not completely, either. It’s irrelevant that this story originally featured another of Howard’s creations, because it ultimately produced a Conan consistent with the later tales. As in so many later stories, Howard emphasizes Conan’s connection to the natural world, describing his ‘cat-like speed’.

Notably, Howard comes to rely on animalistic imagery in his depictions of Conan's reactions and physicality. In 'The Phoenix on the Sword,' Howard settles for pointing out that Conan's 'broad shoulders and sun-browned skin seemed out of place among those luxuriant surroundings'. Interested in Conan's body, Howard notes that it's at odds with the environment in which it finds itself. It's that body, that big, muscled form, that doesn't match the civilized setting. Conan's physicality ties him to the natural world even as it establishes a distance from the artificial world of Conan's palace. This link to animals carries through the Howard canon to the last written of the Conan stories, 'Red Nails,' where Conan regards a dragon he's just poisoned with a fair degree of sympathy and understanding. He feels a 'comprehending interest' in the creature's rage and struggles. Significantly, Conan sees 'no such gulf' between himself, men, and animals; the beast 'was merely a form of life differing from himself mainly in physical shape' with 'characteristics similar to his own'. Howard could not have put this conception of Conan's character any plainer. Indistinct, then, from an animal, Conan would seem to belong to nature, not humanity [or, as we have seen, civilisation].

Indeed, Howard in 'The Phoenix on the Sword,' bluntly describes Conan as 'an image of the unconquerable primordial,' a barbarian, opposite to civilized men in his very nature and essence. Conan's status as a 'natural killer' is such that his strengths trump that of many criminals 'of a breed men called civilized, with a civilized background'. Like a wild animal, Conan's body contains his essence. As a later story remarks, Conan 'was not merely a wild man; he was part of the wild, one with the untameable elements of life; in his veins ran the blood of the wolf-pack; in his brain lurked the brooding depths of the northern night; his heart throbbed with the fire of the blazing forests' ("Black Colossus"). Conan's repudiation of civilization, then, is both caused by his physical form and reflected in it."

All this might be to argue that Howard opposes the constructed artificiality of civilisation and civilised man with the innate essentialism of Conan's very physical barbarism. Conan didn't make himself what he is, thinks Howard, nature made him it and he is embodied nature. Whilst far from stupid, Conan is instinct and physical vitality par excellence. He is everything Howard thinks civilisation has dulled in human beings and he is it without artifice or inauthenticity. It is in this context that Elliott references the quote from "Queen of the Black Coast" where Conan, giving his barbarian philosophy in answer to a question about his beliefs from pirate queen, Bêlit (his designated lover in this story), replies:

"Let me live deep while I live; let me know the rich juices of red meat and stinging wine on my palate, the hot embrace of white (!) arms, the mad exultation of battle when the blue blades flame and crimson, and I am content. Let teachers and priests and philosophers brood over questions of reality and illusion. I know this: if life is illusion, then I am no less an illusion, and being thus, the illusion is real to me. I live, I burn with life, I love, I slay, and am content."

This is a quite remarkable creed of physicality and physical satisfaction, unconcerned with abstract questions or cultured learning. It in fact speaks basically of appetite (whether for food, sex or a test of strength) and its satiation. It is bodily, material and visceral. Conan the barbarian is embodied appetite (autonomy of desire?) and he is perfectly happy to leave it at that with his gods (primarily Crom) who do not care if he lives or dies anyway. Life then becomes mainly about appetites and desires and their fulfillment (and perhaps also about the passion with which they are carried out). All else is organised, or necessitated, around this – morality, the pragmatic decisions of day to day life, etc. Civilisation, which Elliott keeps stressing Conan can't seem to leave alone even though he

keeps condemning it, then plays a constant role in his life because it at least partly exists to satisfy desires. One will find plenty of food, sex and fighting in cities and so they act as magnets to the barbarian. Elliott seems to sum this up nicely when he points out that, for his creator, Conan's body (and its appetites and desires) "is his identity".

This raises the question of sexuality which, in a sword and sorcery series, is as rough and ready and on the nose as one might imagine it to be. (One thinks of the film *The Beastmaster* here, which came out the same year as Milius' *Conan the Barbarian*, in which the role of Tanya Roberts was to be male eye candy in clothes which succeeded in their task of not covering her up.) Primarily, of course, for a series of stories printed in a pulp fiction magazine for what we must imagine was an overwhelmingly male, white, heterosexual, American audience, this is about scantily clad women (the pirate queen Bêlit is topless in the original story "Queen of the Black Coast" even if later comic book retellings find a way to put her in a bikini [of all things] or otherwise obscure her nipples) flitting here and there across the pages advertising their imagined sexual availability – willing or coerced. (One imagines, in fact, that it was almost a requirement to have a nubile young white woman in every story whose clothes more displayed than covered her body. Howard explicitly states in his literary effects that he was only writing to make money and so we can realistically imagine he has no qualms about writing up to his readers' expectations and prejudices (sexual and racial) to a large extent since "giving them what they want" means a publication fee. We should also note here that sex definitely was a selling point. Several editions of *Weird Tales* that had Conan as the feature story were accompanied by cover drawings of near naked women from said stories.) But Elliott also notes that in the stories Conan's body also precedes him – in that it is often mentioned before he is named and formally identified. An example here is Valeria in "Red Nails" (a fine specimen of womanhood herself, described by Howard as

full-breasted and “all woman”) who notices Conan’s “muscles rippling under his skin” before she knows who he is. Valeria also marks him as a “giant” and this prodigious size Elliott notes as yet another marker which sets Conan out as “other” in civilisation.

Here the fact that Conan is often, to a large extent, a body *is what marks him out as other for both the civilisation of the story and for the imaginably civilised reader*. Elliott notes that, for postcolonial criticism:

“the Other is cast as corporeal, carnal, un-tamed, instinctual, raw, and therefore also open to mastery, available for use, for husbandry, for numbering, branding, cataloging, description or possession. Images of the body of the Other are conflated with those of the land, unexplored land too being seen as amorphous, wild, seductive, dark, open to possession...”

Conan fits the definition of the postcolonial other almost perfectly — he’s defined by his body, intensely sexual, certainly instinctive — except that he’s not ‘open to mastery.’ [At least not from his point of view!] Conan may be partially tamed by his [later] kingship and his increasing familiarity with civilization as he ages, but his barbarian spirit always lurks unquietly within him, ready to rise and take over at a moment’s notice. Neither is Conan easily conflated with the land, although he is certainly identified with the barbarian wilds from which he came.”

It seems to me that exemplary bodies, intense sexuality and “otherness” all come together here as that offering of forbidden wildness which the civilised – here most obviously in the guise of the readers of *Weird Tales* – were now denied due to their having been civilised. Conan as bodily physicality, as appetite, as desire (not least sexual), as

Other, is a glimpse into what hypocritical and puritan civility now formally and officially denies itself as it tells itself these things do not belong to it and so cannot be allowed to pervert civilised lives and minds. Several scenes in Conan stories, for example, are basically bondage scenes or what we would now call BDSM scenes (there is more than one case of women whipping women, for example) and here what the civilised tells itself is that civilised morality disdains this kind of thing and, if it gets too involved, may become polluted by it. Winter Elliott makes the argument in his essay that here the women in the stories fill out the category of “the Other” into which Conan also fits for in the cases where they are scantily clad and sexually exploited (or even sometimes exploiting – Valeria from “Red Nails”, the “all woman”, is one who both whips other women and is then herself spread naked on an altar) they are also fulfilling the role of psychological Otherness, often taking up roles in the stories as slave girls or harem members. There is more than the sense that such women are there to allow “civilised” readers to experience bodies, sexuality and the exotic and untamed wildness of the Other from the comfort of their chairs or sofa, book in (one?) hand. Such characters, as Conan, exist at the literary border and intersection of the civilised and the barbarian, the normalised and the Other.

Of course, if Conan is a (sexualised, othered) body in the tales told about him, then the women in his stories mostly are too. As Elliott explains:

“It should go almost without saying that the women of the Conan tales are highly sexualized. There are no mothers, grandmothers, aunts, or best friends in these tales, and only a couple of sisters of any merit, from ‘The People of the Black Circle’ and ‘The Vale of Lost Women.’ There are harem inmates, ‘appropriated’ slave girls — as in Natala from ‘Xuthal of the Dusk’ — rape victims and potential rape victims, and a few rampaging lesbians. Like Conan, Howard’s female characters are reduced to their bodies; but, for the

women, this reduction goes even farther. Even the two strongest women in any of the Conan tales, Bêlit of 'Queen of the Black Coast,' and Valeria of 'Red Nails,' [the two women basis of the Valeria character in the 1982 film *Conan the Barbarian* as I shall discuss at more length next] are defined by their sexuality. Bêlit, notably described by a frightened ship-master as the 'wildest she-devil unhanged', reasonably goes about her pirate's life wearing only a 'broad silken girdle', and Conan's first reaction to sight of her — and her breasts — is sheer, unadulterated lust, which Howard poetically renders as 'a beat of fierce passion'. He has the same reaction to Valeria, although he's known her for a while. With Valeria in 'Red Nails,' Howard goes to some lengths to substantiate her femininity, adamantly describing her as "all woman, in spite of her bearing and her garments'. Women from stories like 'The Frost-Giant's Daughter' don't require that defense. Atali, from 'The Frost-Giant's Daughter,' 'lures men from stricken fields into the wastelands to be slain by her brothers' through the appeal of a 'naked body gleaming like ivory and her golden hair unbearably bright in the moonlight'. Atali's conscious use of her sexuality to bring men to their deaths suggests a concern that women will exceed their role of vulnerable, passive object.

Female objectification in the stories is most present in situations in which women are not merely raped but are clear objects of trade or conquest between men. Now more than a quarter of a century ago, Gayle Rubin's 1975 article 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex' pointed out the ways in which women can function as part of an exchange system between men. These forces are clearly operant in 'Black Colossus,' in which the princess Yasmela finds both herself and her country vulnerable to a predatory sorcerer. While the reader is first told that 'Minstrels sang [Yasmela's] beauty throughout the western world', Yasmela's first appearance in the story obscures her beauty in favor of sexual debasement. She's featured not on a bed, but on her stomach upon the marble floor

in the middle of an act of simulated rape. A big, black shadow hovers above her, presumably holding her down, and the sound of its voice 'filled Yasmela.' In consequence, she 'writhed and twisted her slender body as if beneath a lash' and 'moaned and beat the marble tiles with her small fists in her ecstasy of terror'. Though the act is a figurative rather than a physical rape, Yasmela's body reacts as if she were literally being assaulted. Indeed, the hissing voice clearly explains its owner's intentions: 'You are marked for mine,' it says. Promising to teach her forgotten, and apparently vile, 'ways of pleasure,' the shadow vows that 'The days will not be many before I come to claim mine own!' Yasmela's danger is clearly urgent and personal; an evil, possibly omnipotent, and, worse, ambiguous enemy intends to rape her. But her problem is also her kingdom's problem, as her god Mitra recognizes. He tells her that 'In one manner may you save your kingdom, and saving it, save all the world from the fangs of the serpent which has crawled up out of the darkness of the ages'. Yasmela's concern isn't for the world ; it's for her naked self, vulnerable at night to psychological rape. Yet, Mitra's comment clearly reveals that Yasmela's person is indistinguishable from that of her kingdom. Yasmela and the land to be conquered are one and the same.

Taramis, an imperilled queen in the story 'A Witch Shall Be Born,' has much the same problem. At the outset of the story, she has refused Constantius's marriage proposal, but has unwisely allowed his mercenaries into her country. Unbeknownst to Taramis, Salome, her evil and powerful and previously unknown twin sister, has joined forces with Constantius. Salome gives Taramis to Constantius to rape, but she also gives him the country. Taramis's reaction is first to worry about her country; she exclaims that 'You have betrayed my people'. But that queenly inclination is immediately replaced by a more realistic terror for her own safety, as Constantius seeks 'a little — ah — amusement' with Taramis, who forgets her people 'in the face of the menace to her womanhood'. The scene

ends with 'a scream of despair and poignant agony [that] rang shuddering through the palace', one of the most pitiful lines in all of the stories, because behind that lyrical line is a clearly vicious rape. That rape, though, solidifies Constantius's and Salome's control over the country, because in degrading and debasing Taramis, the country is also despoiled."

This, of course, is rape as vicarious entertainment, the puritans of civilisation with their drawings and paintings that show curves but not holes or points peeking at the sexual violence from behind the curtain, gaining their pleasure from it, but doing nothing about it and not even raising a protest. Conan is full of weak, suppliant, submissive women – or simply women who apparently have no agency of their own (which makes Bêlit and Valeria stand out all the more as they are not entirely subsumed by this theme) – who need the primal, raw and visceral desire of Conan to come and save them. Usually, he gets his “reward” too which, in the logic of the story, is OK because he has “earned it” in civilised logic. A far too neat example of this is in the longest of Howard’s Conan stories, “The Hour of the Dragon”, in which now King Conan (for barbarism must conquer civilisation in the end) is defeated by a sorcerer’s magic, captured and taken to a castle belonging to his enemy. It just so happens, however, that a beautiful slave girl resident at the same facility who has loved Conan and his barbarian body from afar has seen him being hidden away in the dungeons and so she goes to rescue him and help him escape. Thus, being freed, a now liberated Conan who must regain his crown promises that, upon his victory over magic and men, he will not forget her. And at the very end of the story, he asks for her as a spoil of victorious war.

This aside allows me to briefly discuss Conan’s apparent chivalry towards women. Of course, it is artificial. In the Conan stories it is the civilised men who are the unthinking natural born rapists (as befits their coercive way of life) and Conan who would never force

a woman. But it also just so happens that no woman in any story who is praised as sexually desirable seems able to resist the barbarian charms of Conan. Put simply, the stories are written so that Conan has no need to rape because no sexually desirable woman, of which there is a never-ending supply, would possibly wish to refuse a giant, light-skinned, muscly, barbarian male like him. So this is just another way of denying women any realistic agency, the mirror version of the rape, torture and sexual slavery more civilised men carry out without qualm throughout the stories. This is nothing but squalid when one thinks about it and how writing a genuinely autonomous woman with her own sexual agency was either apparently so difficult to imagine or undesirable as a product. (Even Bêlit and Valeria are not completely spared this either and their desire for Conan is typically described in their becoming subservient to him.) One could write here that, in making Conan chivalrous towards women and the civilised beastly, Howard is giving yet more expression to his civilised/barbarian theme. But a queer analysis, such as I am trying to engage in, impugns both sides here when a woman with complete sexual and political agency in any of the stories is basically lacking. (Bêlit is just suddenly found dead in “Queen of the Black Coast”, which is only a short story without time for too much development of relationships, whereas Valeria ends up naked on an altar ready for sacrifice in an act of magic and must rely on Conan to save her. Disappointing, to say the least.)

3. Valeria

At this point my last discussion shades into the one I want to go onto next, the subject of the character Valeria in John Milius’ 1982 film, *Conan the Barbarian*, for she, it turns out, is the female character we need. This film tells an original story by Milius who took over a previous project that was to have been directed and written by Oliver Stone (who is still

co-credited as a writer as some of his ideas survived). That said, obviously elements from the original Howard stories were also taken over and adapted too. One of these is the imagined “love interest” in the film, the character Valeria. But this is NOT the character Valeria from Howard’s last published story (in his lifetime), “Red Nails” – although it obviously uses her name. In fact, Valeria in the film is an amalgam of both this Valeria and the character Bêlit from “Queen of the Black Coast”. (This is most obviously the case in that, in that latter story, Bêlit also comes back from the dead to save Conan just as Valeria does in the film. In the mythology of Howard’s original stories, it is Bêlit whom fans and later writers mostly regard as Conan’s “true love”. Consequently, there are other stories where this relationship is explored further than Howard ever did himself in other media such as comic books.)

Both Bêlit and Valeria are written by Howard as pirate women, Bêlit being the captain of the feared marauding ship *The Tigress* and Valeria being a famous member of the Red Brotherhood. Bêlit is regarded by her all black crew (shades of the colonialism of Tarzan here) as a goddess and they obey her implicitly whereas Valeria is noted in “Red Nails” as having “an unusual strength, without detracting from the femininity of her appearance.” (Howard basically wants it both ways although one can here see hints of Furiosa’s “female masculinity” if you like.) Valeria must have been a notable pirate, however, for Howard remarks that her “deeds are celebrated in song and ballad wherever seafarers gather” and, later on, she is remarked to be the equal, if not the better, of any man in a fight such that even Conan has to take account of her for she is not just any other opponent. (“No living man could disarm Valeria of the Brotherhood with his bare hands” according to the text of “Red Nails” – apparently here even including Conan who is saved from having to test this out by the fortunate entrance of a dragon.)

Howard's depiction of Valeria in "Red Nails" is, in fact, patchy and not altogether convincing. An example is discussed by Winter Elliott:

"In 'Red Nails,' Valeria, exasperated by the constant need to kill her would-be rapists exclaims, 'Why won't men let me live a man's life?'. Conan's reply, 'That's obvious!', seems a little too banal, but he's actually quite correct. Valeria is gendered female, not male, so civilization expects her to act according to the rules laid out for civilized women. Of all of the female characters in the Conan stories by Howard, Valeria is the least obedient and the most able to achieve independence. She's stronger even than Bêlit, a pirate queen. Unlike Bêlit, Valeria does not throw herself at Conan's feet at the first available opportunity, she is capable of killing most of the men — and women — who attack her, and she doesn't fall prey to the stereotypical vice of female greed."

But even though she is put up as the equal or better of any man, even Conan, in a fight, she still ends up as a sexually debased human sacrifice in need of Conan's help at the end, whose sexual life force and virility is to be taken from her by a witch who has lived for far too long by stealing the life of other beautiful younger women from them. If Bêlit sees Conan and immediately swoons (which does not read as remotely believable – but then neither does it that this woman has somehow become a pirate captain of unquestioned authority), Valeria is somewhat betrayed by her creator and put in the role of damsel in distress so that she can be saved. At various points in both "Queen of the Black Coast" and "Red Nails" I find myself saying "this character would never do this" because Howard, in both cases, tries to write "strong women" but he can never quite bring himself to carry this objective through to the end and go all the way. Both Bêlit and Valeria are sensualised and sexualised civilised women but they are also characterised as those who also seek the freedom of which Conan is the primary representative. Thus, in both cases,

these women seek to match Conan and become “the other half” which makes the whole. In both cases, these are not simply women who are victims or those who react to the action of others as so many other, entirely submissive, women in Conan are. Both are agents, have agency, and take direct action for themselves. In doing so, both are somewhat presented as worthy partners for Conan but, due to Howard’s own fallibilities or the needs of the time and context or both, they are both compromised as well. Not least is that in the fact that both are presented as sexual objects for the gaze of the (assumed male heterosexual) reader as well. (Bêlit sexually debases herself before Conan and Valeria is sexually debased by others before him.)

Of the Valeria in “Red Nails” Winter Elliott then says the following:

“Valeria herself represents a mediation between the possibilities of female agency and her own gendered identity. As Conan points out, Valeria can’t escape the simple fact of her femininity. As such, her identity is structured by her society. Like Conan, Valeria’s pursuit of freedom against her society’s wishes marginalizes her, making her other, but it also forces Howard to go to extravagant lengths to substantiate her femininity, which he does by including not one but two female bondage scenes. If she can be subjected to such sexual humiliation, Howard implies, she must be female. Laura Mulvey, in her influential discussion of the purpose of the male gaze in film, pointed out that ‘In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly’. Thus, what happens to Valeria is more about the needs of the reading/viewing audience than her own action or inaction. Valeria in those sexually debased moments isn’t a character in and of herself, but rather a narrative tool designed to provoke a response from the readers.

Paired, Conan and Valeria represent each facet of the reader's other — barbarian and powerful, yet also desirable and conquerable. Together, they also provide a foundation for questioning the gender ideology of the Conan tales. In Howard's tales of Conan, two civilized forces construct both Conan and the various women as Other — the societies within the stories and the apparently civilized reader. Both Valeria and Conan reflect different aspects of the Other, and both are fully necessary to fulfill the reader's expectations and desires of that Other. But many of their attributes are interchangeable to varying degrees; for example, in 'A Witch Shall Be Born,' Conan finds himself gruesomely displayed on a cross [which was used by Milius in the film]. His body, 'Naked but for a loin-cloth', is prominently displayed; Howard spends several pages describing the torture inflicted upon that body and the pain that it feels. When freed, Conan eventually reacts much as Valeria did when she had the opportunity to get revenge [in 'Red Nails']: he kills lots of people. On display, dangled before the gaze of his enemies and the reader, Conan's situation becomes almost indistinguishable from Valeria's."

What is going on here then, obviously, is that the characters are prey to the needs of the readers - and their civilised values must be fed and serviced in and through the tale. But this is not some political essay or some book with a particular didactic purpose like my own. Its writing for entertainment. Conan is sword and sorcery FANTASY – and so fantasies, the fantasies of the civilised, must here be played out. This puts both Conan and the two strongest women in the original stories in a strange position, however. As Elliott applies this to Conan and these women:

"The Conan stories position women as objects within societies, but also abundantly emphasize women's sexual vulnerability. In doing so, they proffer the women to presumably male readers;...

In the Conan tales, the objectified narrative bodies of the women become the locus for those fantasies. But Conan's body is also displayed, also fetishized, and also subjected to fantasy. Unfortunately for Conan, that fact puts him in a distinctly female position, for Western civilization, Howard, and the amorphous civilization of the Hyborian Age define femininity as vulnerability, as body on display."

Now all this is very interesting but its not necessarily much to do with the 1982 film *per se*. Yet it is as necessary background to the film – which is a very different beast. John Milius, in taking over the making of the film, clearly very much wanted to imprint his own ideas on the presentation of his characters and had a definitive vision for what he wanted to say, one that was very different to that of Conan's creator, Robert E. Howard. This begins from the opening frame, before the title music, opening scene or opening credits of the film, which presents the theme of the film in slogan form, subtly misquoting Nietzsche's aphorism "From the military school of life. - What does not kill me makes me stronger" as "That which does not kill us makes us stronger". A personal statement made by Nietzsche in the opening to his *Twilight of the Idols* has been generalised – not necessarily appropriately – by Milius and presented as the meaning of the action to follow in which Conan nearly is killed and Valeria actually is. Is Conan then the example of that which is made stronger because they yet live? Not, to my mind, simply so. In fact, I see this film, the more I watch it (and I am into three figures by now on the viewing count), as about this theme that Milius presents and not really about Conan at all (in much the same way as British film academic and film critic, Mark Kermode, tells us that *Jaws* is NOT a film about a shark. Its a film with a shark in it.)

The most significant character in this film for me is then actually Valeria (which is why I have a section here discussing her in this film). Conan in the film takes a fairly predictable

straight line path from an early chat with his dad about the strength of steel through becoming an orphan, being a slave and then a prizefighter, before being given his freedom, encountering a witch, gaining a travel buddy, Subotai, encountering Valeria prior to a burglary, having a night of passion with her, but then being drawn away because he has this lingering desire to kill Thulsa Doom, the snake-man who once led the raid which murdered his parents and the rest of his native village. This overwhelming mission eventually gets Valeria killed (about which more soon) but he nevertheless completes his mission by the end of the film (thanks to a little help from the now dead Valeria!) and emerges at the end “stronger” because not dead. All the way through this skeleton plot the Nietzschean theme has been played out along with “the riddle of steel” which Conan’s father told him as a boy at the beginning of the film. The message of the film is then that the steel is in the person, not the sword – and Conan has been an example of that. But not, I think, the only one – or the best one.

Valeria’s story is, to me, much more interesting, complex and unexpected – and certainly not detached from this theme either. For a start (in comparison to Howard’s stories), she is not overly sexualised (and so trivialised) and I say this, of course, in the full knowledge that there is a sex scene between Conan and Valeria (something which I noted previously never happens either for Max Rockatansky or Furiosa Jabassa in *Mad Max*) in which Sandahl Bergman, who plays Valeria, is nude (as is Schwarzenegger on occasion in the film) and you see her breasts. The thing about this sex scene, though, is that it is presented entirely consensually as a meeting of equals. Valeria is not taken advantage of or presented as some “mewling quim” or an easy lay. She is not there just so that Conan can fuck her. It is simply that the two robbers who have been brought together by their adventures find a common attraction, being at first thieves wary of each other, and both act upon it autonomously.

Valeria's own characterisation demands this, in fact, for she is presented, on first viewing, as a professional and competent robber and thief who actually leads the raid on the Tower of the Serpent owned by Thulsa Doom. If Valeria, Conan and Subotai are presented as three thieves at that initial meeting, then Valeria is the smartest, the most autonomous and the most daring of them. In fact, she even points out that, although Conan and Subotai have come to climb a large tower, they do not even have a rope (she does). And so she calls them "Two fools who laugh at death." She follows this up by asking Conan, "Do you know what horrors lie beyond that wall?" to which the rather naive Conan answers, "No". "Then you go first!" says Valeria with a grin and a raising of her eyebrows for effect. Inside the tower, Conan plays his role of strong man who fights monsters by killing a large snake whilst Subotai plays sidekick but Valeria again plays the smart role, disguising herself and helping in their getaway after the Eye of the Serpent has been stolen. Here, once again, her wit and intelligence is highlighted for while Conan and Subotai must once again climb the tower, this time from the inside, she uses her speed and agility to stun a man, tie a rope around his neck, and throw him into a pit, grabbing the other end of the rope (which is around a block and tackle) to get hoisted by the inertia of his falling weight up to the top. Arriving there, she then says her catchphrase – "Do you want to live forever?" – before jumping from the top into a pool below. Conan and Subotai follow meekly and naively behind her. All this action serves to show, in their opening meeting, that Valeria is no mere sexual slave girl, no dumb piece of ass, no boobs to titillate the audience (she is in fact dressed very much the part of a thief and is never dressed to accentuate her feminine curves in a way we might find exploitative as is Tanya Roberts in the contemporaneous *Beastmaster*), a piece of skirt to accompany Conan's muscly magnificence. She's the smartest, most driven, most daring person in the room, someone who takes the initiative and acts with agency. And that stays constant throughout the film.

We see it, for example, when she and Conan are captured and hauled before King Osric of Zamora who has heard about their thievery (of which he approves) and wishes to employ them to steal his daughter back from Thulsa Doom. On being asked where Subotai is, Valeria (taking the initiative where we might expect a dominant Conan to do so) lies and says "The lions ate him." Conan simply stands mute. When Osric offers to pay the now three thieves (Subotai is brought in soon after as the subterfuge is revealed) to steal his daughter back, it is Valeria who steps forward first to gather the payment. It is then Valeria, later when discussing with Conan, who suggests to him that they take the bounty and run, refusing the job (for, she reasons, it is far too dangerous) but keeping the wealth they have made. Valeria, however, does not know Conan's personal story and so his attachment to Thulsa Doom's cult of snakes as he listens to her transfixed by an emblem he took from the Tower of the Serpent during the raid. As Valeria passionately tells some of her own story of wandering loneliness and offers Conan an adventuring partnership based on their own freely given and autonomous love ("let's take the world by the throat and make it give us what we desire"), we, but not she, sees that Conan is more concerned with the snake emblem and we have the feeling that something other than that is about to happen. It does, for next morning Valeria awakes to find that Conan is gone. All that is left is the biggest and most valuable jewel from their raid together, about which Conan does not care besides his desire to kill Thulsa Doom.

At this point the story could simply continue with Conan and his interaction with Thulsa Doom, the story progressing and Valeria (and sidekick Subotai) disappearing. Valeria has no particular reason to go after Conan. After all, she has only just met him and she had made her pitch the night before and Conan had flatly turned her down without so much as a word of explanation – despite the fact that Valeria had recounted to him all the times she was alone when others weren't and the emotional damage that had done. As the

picture of Valeria, a tear running down her abandoned cheek, fades, we see Conan, now on horseback, gone to meet with his destiny. The thing is, at this point in the story, Valeria is clearly an experienced and accomplished thief. She could just go back to it (with the profits from the Eye of the Serpent amongst her baggage) and we might even expect her to. Is this not the context of her actual life? But that is another Valeria, a more sexual piece of fluff – not this one. Whilst Conan, who is not nearly as smart as Valeria or as good at disguises, gets captured and crucified by Thulsa Doom and his henchmen, Rexus and Thorgrimm, she (with Subotai for company whom she had already persuaded to her original plan anyway) is coming after Conan. Although she has been flatly refused by someone with something better to do, Valeria does not give up on her love or renege on her association as Conan does. What does this mean?

First of all, I think that Conan, in all media about him, is basically a wanderer, an adventurer. He is not the “settle down and have a wife and kids” type. That, in fact, is part of his barbarian appeal (written from a male and heterosexual perspective). He is not set in his ways and required to live a structured life as you and I probably are. He is Other, outside. So even if Conan, in this story, didn’t have Thulsa Doom to deal with, there should be no pretending that Conan and Valeria are, or should be, forever lovers or a permanent and exclusive couple. (The situation here is then the same as with Conan and Bêlit in “Queen of the Black Coast”.) This is, and was always going to be, a moment and nothing more for most of Conan’s assignations with women are expected to be with voluptuous sex objects there as someone for Conan to bed before moving on. So there is that to consider. But there are also other, more interesting, things, things about Valeria specifically. For here I contend that Valeria is anything but sexual fluff.

In discussion about this issue with someone I trust and respect a lot for her own authenticity and intellect, the point was raised to me that, from her informed perspective, the issue here might be that what is going on is some version of the sexist trope where women are “consumed by their passions and emotions” in a way which makes them seem either neurotic or certainly lacking in an imagined appropriate rationality (probably in a scheme where rationality/emotion is a binary [like man/woman] and the first term is thought superior to the second). So a pertinent question we might then ask here is if Valeria is “throwing her life away for an undeserving man” – in the sense that Valeria made her play for Conan’s partnership (sexual and otherwise) but he turned her down and just disappeared instead, perhaps never even expecting (or caring) to see her again. Does such a person deserve her friendship or loyalty? Is her character that worthless it must be sacrificed for his that did not deserve the sacrifice? So the question then is if Valeria is free to follow her passions here, if her rationality is in play as well as her emotion and desire, and if she can be autonomous from both her society’s expectations – but also from those which the writer, director and audience of the film will have. This line of questioning, however, makes *me* wonder if Valeria is even “following Conan” at all to begin with (from my own perspective) or if something else is going on – perhaps even at the same time.

Now it could always be the case that the proactive Valeria with agency and autonomy we saw earlier in the film has suddenly been betrayed (again!) by her male writer and director. Perhaps what my friend sees is even what John Milius (the man who came up with “Go ahead, make my day” for Dirty Harry) intended for we cannot and should not imagine him some kind of feminist. He is not setting out to write a character that’s meant to be a female icon or example and the film is called *Conan the Barbarian* not *Valeria the Feminist Example*. So what I see here is this:

Unless we are going to argue Valeria is betrayed by her writer then we must choose to see Valeria's decision to go after Conan as consonant with her autonomous characterisation up until that point. (So it is not a matter of if Conan deserves anything. It is a matter of what Valeria autonomously chooses to do and to give.) In fact, we could ask if Valeria simply turns into a completely different person, the sexual fluff, a much more submissive or emotionally sappy person, after Conan leaves for Doom's Mountain of Power and the answer, I think, is that she clearly does not. Now there is no doubting that her relationship with and to Conan (I speak here from her side) becomes one entwined with passionate love. (Nietzsche, in his notebooks, has a reflection on "love" and how it affects our thinking, transfiguring reality itself in the process.) The question is, must we impugn her for that fact? Is passionate love, and acting according to it, something to be ashamed of?

I can only say there that I don't think so and Valeria is never simply or only defined by this anyway. Neither should we imagine that, in taking this course of action, Valeria simply becomes Conan's mewling quim, his easy lay gone all emotional, by doing so. She is acting as the same autonomous Valeria with agency (as far as I am concerned) from the first time the camera saw her. Neither should we necessarily belittle her because she pushes her passion (which is not to be contrasted with rationality but considered side by side with it for we are whole organisms not discrete parts) all the way and pays the ultimate price (something she could not have known in advance). Valeria, in other words, makes her own choices (just as Conan did in leaving her behind) and we should not berate her for something that we would not, for example, berate Conan for. Each does their own thing, autonomously, and each has their own reasons – where "reasons" are never dispassionate things anyway except in the faulty schemes of abstract thinkers.

So I think it too simplistic (indeed, inaccurate) to say that Valeria falls prey to her emotions here. I think that Valeria is not “throwing her life away for an undeserving man” (performing an expected role) but making an autonomous choice as a character with agency (if within a traditional monogamous and heterosexual romantic framework. I would have written it as a queer threesome with Subotai included but that was probably too much for early Eighties mainstream audiences!). I think she is “free to follow her passions” (inasmuch as anyone with real passions actually is) and that, in giving us the heteroromantic storyline which viewers would to some degree expect, Valeria is *not* presented as a typically subservient bit of pussy for Conan to have in doing so – for her characterisation is all wrong for that. Valeria, in *Conan the Barbarian*, is far more autonomous and independent than any woman Conan’s creator, Robert E. Howard, ever wrote in a Conan story (he also created Red Sonja, who was also, like Valeria, to be played by Sandahl Bergman on film in the 80s until she turned it down) and is neither simply the “woman playing a man” type we sometimes see (Red Sonja is more like this) or the typically submissive and exploitable woman who is just there to provide sexual entertainment of multiple literary Conan stories. So, no, Valeria isn’t *simply* following Conan, her previous characterisation now betrayed; something else *is* going on.

We see this as the story plays out. Valeria pledges to fight evil spirits and kill wizards if Conan should not recover from his injuries. And she actually does fight the spirits – whilst the wizard hides in his hut and Subotai only belatedly helps her. Is fighting for things you love and want a bad thing? Isn’t fighting the *rational* thing to do? (The story seems to suggest it is because Valeria’s fight saves Conan’s life, not the last time that will happen.) It is then that Valeria pledges that she would come back from death to “fight at your side” (and I understand this to mean, importantly, “as an equal” rather than as less or because it is required or demanded by her now imagined willingly subservient character that has

been created by her falling prey to emotion). This is another expression of Valeria's autonomy of desire, her will to want what she wants and love who she will love, whatever the cost. It is a commitment we also know all too well from LGBTQ+ history where autonomy of love can always have an unfortunately deadly price (as *V for Vendetta* also showed in the example of Valerie). Yet we should note that this is also a masculinising image for here Valeria is coded as a warrior like Conan is too, a brother-in-arms (recalling Valeria of the Red Brotherhood). The image of "fighting by your side" (which she then does when the three enter the Mountain of Power to take the princess) is a male one and conjures up pictures of battlefields (where, depending on the battlefield, it is not always merely men who fight anyway as we have seen in this book) and reminds us very readily of fellow masculine female, Furiosa.

But what is then the lesson of Valeria overall? I take it exactly to be – in thievery or battle or love – autonomy of desire – and autonomy of desire as something magnetically attractive and in contrast to a more stereotypical romance in which strong, powerful man seduces weak and willing female (for Valeria is not this). Who would not want this love from someone so passionate, so autonomous of desire, as Valeria? Who would not want a person prepared to go all the way "by their side" – and not because they are required to (it is not a usual element of traditional romance that women pledge their deaths in battle for their beloved in order to be considered authentic) but because, in a frankly very "masculine female" way, they choose to do so. In *Conan the Barbarian* Valeria is at least as autonomous as Conan himself is and she demonstrates "the riddle of steel" just as much as he does – if to different outcomes. Valeria here is the mirror to Conan's character that was discussed earlier in reference to the stories in the literature – except she is a much more fitting match than either Bêlit or the literary Valeria could be. This is not least because Valeria is presented as masculine female in several ways (intelligence, leadership,

initiative, strength, fighting ability, dress, autonomy) and not at all as the agencyless piece of ass women so often are in such fictional situations. Conan and Valeria here are much better suited and they example dovetailing autonomies of desire. Their reasons are always their own and they choose each other, when they do, for their own reasons rather than because a stereotypical heterosexual romantic arc is simply being played out. (Note here that Conan does not “get the girl” and the story is not played that way anyway. If anything, their relationship ends up as one of “fellow adventurers” in which love is a component part.)

The price Valeria ultimately pays is then her price to pay, her choice to pay, her autonomy, and there is no sense she does it with anything other than her eyes wide open in a very authentic way (whatever we may speculate about her belief in wizards and gods and their debts). Valeria, who is a lover and a fighter in her companionship with Conan, does not go out in this story on a down note as a willing and perhaps pathetic sacrifice anyway. She saves Conan once again (as one who committed herself to him as a lover and a fighter, a gender-mixed role) in the final battle and returns victorious even over death as a Valkyrie, one we can imagine was welcomed into Valhalla and the hall of the deserving dead (something else in all likelihood masculine female coded). So Valeria is not a sacrifice and she doesn't give herself up for the superior man either for, although clearly female, she is not submissively female. (Even as she is dying she is instructing Conan “Hold me. Kiss me. Let me breathe my last breath into your mouth.”) She is simply autonomous and acting with agency in a way quite positively cross-gender coded and the story plays out. Valeria has died a proud lover and a fighter, a person of “steel” far more surprising than when Conan becomes the same thing (for that is absolutely to be expected): Do you want to live forever?

4. The Shape of Freedom

In discussing Conan with my friend who had views on the characterisation of Valeria, I also discussed “civilisation vs barbarism” with her. Her grasp, as a professional middle class person, of the concept “barbarism” seemed to be at the level of that idea as essentially being little more than survivalism or mere surviving. So Conan, an uncultured man who, as I have described, is in some respects simply embodied appetites or desires, is in her mind merely existing from moment to moment and his life is about little other than him being able to do so. Her concept of “civilisation”, which chimed in my ears as a remarkably and surprisingly unpolitical one (for she is personally and professionally very political), was then that civilisation is that part of life which provides all the “added value” to living. So it is a thing consciously about culture, art and craft (“that which makes human” if we are to be Arendtian about it) which she thinks in many respects makes life worth living. Her view is that life is (must be?) about more than the labour of mere survival and this is what she calls “civilisation”. Her view sounded to me, without being patronising, as exactly what I would expect a professional middle class person to say. Who, more than the professional middle classes, has more of a stake in whatever civilisation is anyway? Where would one find more convinced defenders of civilisation than here, the place where civilisation is maintained in its status quo via its institutions? Of course, for such people, life is about culture and art and craft because they are its primary audience and its primary utilisers. This is what life is pitched at such people to be about. So of course its lack will also seem shallow and empty and like “mere survival”.

But, as I hope will have been seen in my discussion above, such is not really what I mean in talking about barbarism and civilisation at all. The subject, in my mind, is an implicitly political one about human relations, about what it takes to create and maintain those

relations in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. (So, in John Zerzan's terms, hunter-gathering is "barbarism" and agriculture is "civilisation".) We can see that more clearly, perhaps, if we take these two terms from the discussion of Howard's Conan and import them into my other fictional examples in this book. In *Mad Max* what is civilisation and what is barbarism? Well, civilisation could be what was lost and was on the way out in the original film, all that has been left in the Wasteland now being barbarism. But probably there would be those who would want to argue that something like The Green Place is civilisation and something like the biker hordes of Dementus is barbarism. But its hard to say because, in the Wasteland, everyone is just more or less surviving anyway. So perhaps a more clear cut example is *V for Vendetta*. In this story the civilisation is the barbarism and the barbarism of V, the anarchy, is the civilisation! Simple, right?

I think we need to forget the words for a moment and describe the values behind them. This is not least because these terms will mean different things to different people. I also don't think we should fall into the trap, which could be easy to do, of imagining that civilisation is the only positive term here and that barbarism is a negative one, an absence of what civilisation is imagined to have. This is not how I conceive of barbarism at all and it apparently wasn't how Robert E. Howard thought about it either. Barbarism, I imagine for both myself and Howard, but not necessarily in the same way, has its own positive terms besides also being a positive and deliberate REFUSAL of civilisation in a way anthropologically acknowledged by scholars such as David Graeber who speaks of "refusal" as a way in which cultures avoided copying each other by refusing to do things that others did because they wanted to go a different way. For Graeber refusal was consequent on the notion (also spoken to in his book co-written with the archaeologist David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, which gives examples) that groups of people CAN CHOOSE what they want to be, what societies they want to create and how they

want to relate. Things don't just have to be a certain way (for example, a way somebody is telling you is just "natural" when what it actually is is "naturalised") and "civilisation" isn't just some pre-selected collection of things that is there, ready to hand, ready to be implemented or not in a way which makes their implementation "civilised" and their lack of implementation "barbarism". (What is "natural" strangely seems to turn out to be different things in practice, depending on where you are in the world, anyway.) What I am saying, then, is that civilisation, thinking like this, is a very specific thing (actually several different specific things, depending on who you ask) and what is being called "barbarism" is too.

This is relevant in the context of the discussion I had with my friend because "Doing more than labour" (as she put it, where, by labour, she means the work of survival or barbarism) does not have to mean "civilisation" as we might understand that term (for example, as she understands it in terms of the added value activities of life like culture, art and craft). Much less does it have to mean "this civilisation" conceived of as a set of political and economic relations and institutions, and all that goes along with that, with which we are currently familiar. The point there is that we can get to "culture, art and craft" (one would hope), to "humanising activities", without necessitating global climate crisis, a prison of economic ties based on debt, the concept of private, legal property and the reality of waged servitude. All these things are as much the business of civilisation as are art galleries, the opera, the Glastonbury Festival and pottery. That point being granted, it would seem to undercut my friend's point that civilisation is fundamentally about culture and art and craft, the things that make us human, and instead suggests that these things are separable from a Western political and economic notion of civilisation as we have come to understand it. Indeed, we recognise that there were other civilisations than this one historically which were surely not all simply the same and "culture and art and craft"

was not suddenly invented in Western Europe about 400 years ago. Civilisation, then, is neither a particular politics or economics nor particular cultural activities in the abstract. One can imagine multiple constructions and inter-relations of these things which might be appropriately civilisational. Or not.

That said, I think that Zerzan was on the right track when he imagined civilisation as a value and that value was “domestication” – indicating that he imagines civilisation in general as something which brings things, in general, under control. With this understanding we can see why and how collective activity becomes necessitated within a policing and accounting frame of mind. We can also see how and why this is particularly relevant to a static situation of agriculture and property, one in which people have settled down rather than being unaccountable nomads. (Note now how travelling people are often regarded as the enemies of the civilised. Their very means of existence chafes against the civilised requirement that people stay put! Civilisation is a bigotry against the mobile or simply the homeless it has itself created.) Civilisation is then to be conceived of as a set of values and preferences which necessitates certain social actions and relations. (Archaeologist David Wengrow has had a similar thought in his work, I think, when he refers to civilisations as “moral communities”.) The same will then apply, of course, to barbarism (communities of people with other morals) and in the disparity between the two we will find the places where friction likely occurs. Cue two lists:

Civilisation is:

1. Policed
2. Controlling/coercive
3. Centralised

4. Institutionalised
5. Moralistic
6. Based on fixed (and sometimes forced) relations that endure over time
7. Indoctrinating
8. Hierarchical/patriarchal
9. Reliant on servitude/forced labour
10. A phenomenon which counts and accounts for things
11. Property based
12. Domestication as an organising principle
13. About creating enclosed, systematic relations

Barbarism is:

1. Based in kinships which can voluntaristically be created or changed
2. Based in autonomies of desire
3. Adventurous
4. Open-ended
5. Flexible
6. Relational without being programmatic
7. Spontaneous rather than dogmatic
8. Not burdened with the idea that one must act as others act
9. Opportunistic
10. About creating your own story, not fitting into the one true story
11. Personal authenticity
12. The Land of Do-As-You-Please
13. The Wasteland

These, of course, are not definitive lists nor permanent final descriptions. They are merely heuristic devices to give readers a feel for where I am coming from and what my interpretation is. (Alternatively, they are points to *start* a conversation about civilisation and barbarism rather than conclusions at the end of one.) I think that “civilisation” and “barbarism” are words which give a name to ideas (which materialise in human relations) and that, depending on where you think you stand, you will take different views on those ideas (and relations) relative to that position. So I, for example, do not see myself nearly so cosy with civilisation as my female friend does. In many respects, I despise the civilisation I am sure she imagines is both necessary and beneficial (although I don’t for a second imagine she could not also find multiple problems with it). Imagining myself as someone much more “outside”, barbarism strikes me as a much more attractive proposition because when I think of civilisation I think of things such as we find in my list of 13 civilisational things above. Civilisation, so I testify, has actively done me (and, of course, not only me) harm throughout my life. And I have no duty to be a friend of it. I may, in fact, have more self-respecting duty to be its enemy. Of course, it may be that, were we all living in barbarism, I would suffer from that too. But there is a difference – for barbarism does not set out to control everybody’s life and so IT CANNOT BE BLAMED for what happens within in. Civilisation, on the other hand, creates forced relationships and creates coercive situations in a structural way. And so it very much CAN, and should, be blamed.

French anthropologist Pierre Clastres wrote the following in his book of political anthropology, *Society Against the State*, which was about “primitive” (one is tempted to add “barbarian”) societies that existed (or even still exist) without “becoming civilised” and being states. He begins his concluding chapter as follows:

"Primitive societies are societies without a State. This factual judgment, accurate in itself, actually hides an opinion, a value judgment that immediately throws doubt on the possibility of constituting political anthropology as a strict science. What the statement says, in fact, is that primitive societies are missing something - the State - that is essential to them, as it is to any other society: our own, for instance. Consequently, those societies are incomplete; they are not quite true societies - they are not civilized - their existence continues to suffer the painful experience of a lack - the lack of a State - which, try as they may, they will never make up. Whether clearly stated or not, that is what comes through in the explorers' chronicles and the work of researchers alike: society is inconceivable without the State; the State is the destiny of every society. One detects an ethnocentric bias in this approach; more often than not it is unconscious, and so the more firmly anchored. Its immediate, spontaneous reference, while perhaps not the best known, is in any case the most familiar. In effect, each one of us carries within himself, internalized like the believer's faith, the certitude that society exists for the State. How, then, can one conceive of the very existence of primitive societies if not as the rejects of universal history, anachronistic relics of a remote stage that everywhere else has been transcended? Here one recognizes ethnocentrism's other face, the complementary conviction that history is a one-way progression, that every society is condemned to enter into that history and pass through the stages which lead from savagery to civilization. 'All civilized peoples were once savages,' wrote Raynal. But the assertion of an obvious evolution cannot justify a doctrine which, arbitrarily tying the state of civilization to the civilization of the State, designates the latter as the necessary end result assigned to all societies. One may ask what has kept the last of the primitive peoples as they are."

Consider now the following words which are taken from the opening of Richard Rorty's essay (which he says is concerned with "spirituality and secularism" and was written when Joseph Ratzinger was Pope) titled "An Ethics for Today":

"Pope Benedict XVI has complained that it is becoming very difficult for the Church to say what it believes. Very soon, the pope has written, one will not be able to affirm that homosexuality constitutes, as the Catholic Church teaches, an objective disorder in the structure of human existence. The pope's prediction may well come true. Where I come from, on the campus of my university, it is already the case that to condemn homosexuality or to treat homosexuality, homosexual desire, as perverse or somehow immoral would be regarded as an outrageous display of vicious intolerance. So the pope is justified in fearing that the pressure of outraged public opinion may force the Church to pass over the topic of homosexuality in silence. I hope that this will happen. I hope that the pope's fears will be confirmed because I think that condemning homosexuality has produced a great deal of unnecessary, pointless human misery. The Church's attitude has greatly decreased the sum of human happiness. The controversy about homosexuality raises a central question about the nature of morality. Is the Church right that there is such a thing as the structure of human existence, which can serve as a moral reference point? Or, do we human beings have no moral obligations except helping one another satisfy our desires, thus achieving the greatest possible amount of happiness? I agree with John Stuart Mill, the great utilitarian philosopher, that that is the only moral obligation we have.

The Church, of course, holds that views such as Mill's reduce human beings to the level of animals. But philosophers like me think that utilitarianism exalts us by offering us a challenging moral ideal. Utilitarianism leads to heroic and self-sacrificing efforts on behalf of social justice. Such efforts are entirely compatible with the claim that there is no such

thing as the structure of human existence. The Spanish philosopher George Santayana once said that superstition is the confusion of an ideal with power. Superstition, he said, is the belief that any legitimate ideal must somehow be grounded in something already actual, something transcendent that sets this ideal before us. What the pope calls the structure of human existence is an example of such a transcendent entity. Santayana said, and I agree, that the only source of moral ideals is the human imagination. Santayana hoped that human beings would eventually give up the idea that moral ideals must be grounded in something larger than ourselves. He hoped that we would come to think of all such ideals as human creations and none the worse for that. Santayana's claim that imagination is a good enough source for the ideal led him to say that religion and poetry are identical in essence. He used the term 'poetry' in an expansive sense to mean something like 'product of the imagination.' He used the word 'religion' in an equally large sense to include political idealism, aspirations to make the life of a community radically different, radically better than it had been before. Poetry, Santayana said, is called religion when it intervenes in life, and religion, when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry. Neither poetry nor religion, Santayana believed, should be thought of as telling us about something that is already real. We should stop asking about the claims made on us by an ideal, nor should we ask about the nature of our obligation to live up to the ideal. To give oneself over to a moral ideal is like giving oneself over to another human being. When we fall in love with another person, we do not ask about the source or the nature of our obligation to cherish that person's welfare. It is equally pointless to do so when we have fallen in love with an ideal. Most of Western philosophy is, like Christian theology, an attempt to get in touch with something larger than ourselves. So to accept Santayana's view, as I do, is to repudiate the tradition that Heidegger called onto-theology. That repudiation means ceasing to ask both metaphysical questions about the ground or the source of our ideals and epistemological questions about how one can be certain that one has chosen the

correct ideal. To recur to my previous analogy, it is silly to ask for a proof that those whom we love are the best possible people for us to have fallen in love with. But of course we can fall out of love with one person as a result of falling in love with another person. Similarly, we may desert one ideal because we have come to cherish another ideal. What we cannot do is to choose between two people, or between two ideals, by reference to neutral criteria. When it is a matter, for example, of conversion from an atheistic form of spirituality to a religious form, or from a religious form to an atheistic form, it is futile to look for a demonstration that one has turned in the right direction. The onto-theological tradition that Santayana stigmatized as superstition insists, however, that one must raise metaphysical and epistemological questions about our ideals, that it is our duty to follow in Plato's footsteps. The way of thinking that began with Socrates and Plato tells us that simply to throw oneself into the realization of a project is to become a creature of blind will, bestial rather than human. Calling that project the realization of an ideal does not make such unthinking willfulness any better. This Platonic way of thinking finds expression in one of the new pope's most frequently quoted remarks. In a homily given just before his election to the papacy, Cardinal Ratzinger said:

'Today, having a clear faith based on the creed of Christ, the creed of the Church, is often labelled fundamentalism, whereas relativism—that is, letting oneself be tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine—seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and its desires.'

Philosophers like Santayana and Mill do indeed refuse to recognize anything as definitive. This is because they think that every reported object of philosophical speculation or of religious worship is a product of the human imagination. Someday it may be replaced by a

better object. There is no destined end to this process of replacement, no point at which we can claim to have found the correct ideal once and for all. There is nothing already in existence to which our moral convictions should try to correspond. What the pope disparagingly calls the relativists' habit of being carried about by every wind of doctrine is viewed by philosophers like myself as openness to new possibilities, willingness to consider all suggestions about what might increase human happiness. Being open to doctrinal change, we believe, is the only way to avoid the evils of the past."

The final text I want to quote is taken from French politician and anarchist thinker Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's book *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1851, which was written in prison as Proudhon was habitually subjected to malicious prosecutions and the suppression of his newspapers and other literature due to his imagined unacceptable, dangerous and politically critical beliefs (which might be described as "permanent revolution by the direct action of the people"). In this book Proudhon portrays a vision of an ideal society where frontiers are taken down, nation states abolished, and where there is no central authority or law of government, except for power residing in communes and local associations governed by contractual law. My quotation below shares a few snippets of these ideas:

"THE form under which men first conceived of Order in Society is the patriarchal or hierarchical; that is to say, in principle, Authority; in action, Government. Justice, which afterwards was divided into distributive and commutative justice, appeared at first under the former heading only: a SUPERIOR granting to INFERIORS what is coming to each one.

The governmental idea sprang from family customs and domestic experience: no protest arose then: Government seemed as natural to Society as the subordination of children to

their father. That is why M. de Bonald was able to say, and rightly, that the family is the embryo of the State, of which it reproduces the essential classes: the king in the father, the minister in the mother, the subject in the child . . .

The prejudice in favour of government having sunk into our deepest consciousness, stamping even reason in its mould, every other conception has been for a long time rendered impossible, and the boldest thinkers could but say that Government was no doubt a scourge, a chastisement for humanity; but that it was a necessary evil! That is why, up to our own days, the most emancipating revolutions and all the eruptions of liberty have always ended in a reiteration of faith in, and submission to, power; why all revolutions have served only to re-establish tyranny: I make no exception of the Constitution of 1793, any more than of that of 1848, the two most advanced expressions nevertheless of French democracy. What has maintained this mental predisposition and made its fascination invincible for so long a time, is that, through the supposed analogy between Society and the family, the Government has always presented itself to the mind as the natural organ of justice, the protector of the weak, the preserver of the peace. By the attribution to it of provident care and of full guarantee, the Government took root in the hearts, as well as in the minds, of men; it formed a part of the universal soul. it was the faith, the intimate, invincible superstition of the citizens! If this confidence weakened, they said of Government, as they said of Religion and Property, it is not the institution which is bad, but the abuse of it; it is not the king who is wicked but his ministers; Ah, if only the king knew!

Thus to the hierarchical and absolutist view of a governing authority, is added an ideal which appeals to the soul, and conspires incessantly against the desire for equality and independence. The people at each revolution think to reform the faults of their government according to the inspiration of their hearts; but they are deceived by their own ideas. While

they think that they will secure Power in their own interest, they really have it always against them: in place of a protector, they give themselves a tyrant.

Experience, in fact, shows that everywhere and always the Government, however much it may have been for the people at its origin, has placed itself on the side of the richest and most educated class against the more numerous and poorer class; it has little by little become narrow and exclusive; and, instead of maintaining liberty and equality among all, it works persistently to destroy them, by virtue of its natural inclination towards privilege...

The idea of contract excludes that of government ...What characterizes the contract is the agreement for equal exchange; and it is by virtue of this agreement that liberty and well-being increase; while by the establishment of authority, both of these necessarily diminish. This will be evident if we reflect that contract is the act whereby two or several individuals agree to organize among themselves, for a definite purpose and time, that industrial power which we have called exchange; and in consequence have obligated themselves to each other, and reciprocally guaranteed a certain amount of services, products, advantages, duties, etc., which they are in a position to obtain and give to each other; recognizing that they are otherwise perfectly independent, whether for consumption or production.

Between contracting parties there is necessarily for each one a real personal interest; it implies that a man bargains with the aim of securing his liberty and his revenue at the same time, without any possible loss. Between governing and governed, on the contrary, no matter how the system of representation or of delegation of the governmental function is arranged, there is necessarily alienation of a part of the liberty and of the means of the citizen...

The contract therefore is essentially reciprocal: it imposes no obligation upon the parties, except that which results from their personal promise of reciprocal delivery: it is not subject to any external authority: it alone forms the law between the parties: it awaits their initiative for its execution ...

The social contract should increase the well-being and liberty of every citizen - If any one-sided conditions should slip in; if one part of the citizens should find themselves, by the contract, subordinated and exploited by the others, it would no longer be a contract; it would be a fraud, against which annulment might at any time be invoked justly.

The social contract should be freely discussed, individually accepted, signed with their own hands, by all the participants. If the discussion of it were forbidden, cut short or juggled, if consent were obtained by fraud; if signature were made in blank, by proxy, or without reading the document and the preliminary explanation; or even if, like the military oath, consent were a matter of course and compulsory; the social contract would then be no more than a conspiracy against the liberty and well-being of the most ignorant, the weakest and the most numerous, a systematic spoliation, against which every means of resistance, and even of reprisal, would be a right and a duty ...

[Now] The idea of Anarchy had hardly been implanted in the mind of the people when it found so-called gardeners who watered it with their calumnies, fertilized it with their misrepresentations, warmed it in the hothouse of their hatred, supported it by their stupid opposition. Today, thanks to them, it has borne the anti-governmental idea, the idea of Labour, the idea of Contract, which is growing, mounting, seizing with its tendrils the workingmen's societies, and soon, like the grain of mustard seed of the Gospel, it will form a great tree, with branches which cover the earth.

The sovereignty of Reason having been substituted for that of Revelation,

The notion of Contract succeeding that of Government,

Historic evolution leading Humanity inevitably to a new system,

Economic criticism having shown that political institutions must be lost in industrial organization,

We may conclude without fear that the revolutionary formula cannot be Direct Legislation, nor Direct Government, nor Simplified Government, that it is NO GOVERNMENT.

Neither monarchy, nor aristocracy, nor even democracy itself, in so far as it may imply any government at all, even though acting in the name of the people, and calling itself the people. No authority, no government, not even popular, that is the Revolution.

Rousseau teaches in unmistakable terms that in a government really democratic and free the citizen, in obeying the law, obeys only his own will. But the law has been made without my participation, despite my absolute disapproval, despite the injury which it inflicts upon me. The State does not bargain with me: it gives me nothing in exchange: it simply practices extortion up on me. Where then is the bond of conscience, reason, passion or interest which binds me?

But what do I say? Laws for one who thinks for himself, and who ought to answer only for his own actions; laws for one who wants to be free, and feels himself worthy of liberty? I am ready to bargain, but I want no laws. I recognize none of them: I protest against every order

which it may please some power, from pretended necessity, to impose upon my free will. Laws! We know what they are, and what they are worth! Spider webs for the rich and powerful, steel chains for the weak and poor, fishing nets in the hands of the Government. . .

With suffrage, or the universal vote, it is evident that the law is neither direct nor personal, any more than collective. The law of the majority is not my law, it is the law of force; hence the government based upon it is not my government; it is government by force.

That I may remain free; that I may not have to submit to any law but my own, and that I may govern myself, the authority of the suffrage must be renounced: we must give up the vote, as well as representation and monarchy. In a word, everything in the government of society which rests on the divine must be suppressed, and the whole rebuilt upon the human idea of CONTRACT. . .

The system of contracts, substituted for the system of laws, would constitute the true government of the man and of the citizen; the true sovereignty of the people, the REPUBLIC.

For the contract is Liberty, the first term of the republican motto. . . I am not free when I depend upon another for my work, my wages, or the measure of my rights and duties; whether that other be called the Majority or Society. No more am I free, either in my sovereignty or in my action, when I am compelled by another to revise my law, were that other the most skilful and most just of arbiters. I am no more at all free when I am forced to give myself a representative to govern me, even if he were my most devoted servant.

The Contract is Equality, in its profound and spiritual essence. Does this man believe himself my equal; does he not take the attitude of my master and exploiter, who demands from me more than it suits me to furnish, and has no intention of returning it to me; who says that I am incapable of making my own law, and expects me to submit to his?

The contract is Fraternity, because it identifies all interests, unifies all divergences, resolves all contradictions, and in consequence, gives wings to the feelings of goodwill and kindness, which are crushed by economic chaos, the government of representatives, alien law.

The contract, finally, is order, since it is the organization of economic forces, instead of the alienation of liberties, the sacrifice of rights, the subordination of wills . . .

In cases in which production requires great division of labour, and a considerable collective force, it is necessary to form an ASSOCIATION among the workers in this industry; because without that, they would remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two industrial castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society.

Such therefore is the rule that we must lay down, if we wish to conduct the Revolution intelligently.

Every industry, operation or enterprise, which by its nature requires the employment of a large number of workmen of different specialities, is destined to become a society or company of workers . . .

Large scale industry may be likened to a new land, discovered or suddenly created out of the air, by the social genius; to which society sends a colony to take possession of it and to work it, for the advantage of all.

This colony will be ruled by a double contract, that which gives it title, establishes its Property, and fixes its rights and obligations toward the mother country; and the contract which unites the different members among themselves, and determines their rights and duties.

Toward Society, of which it is a creation and a dependence, this working company promises to furnish always the products and services which are asked of it, at a price as nearly as possible that of cost, and to give the public the advantage of all desirable betterments and improvements.

To this end, the working company abjures all combinations, submits itself to the law of competition, and holds its books and records at the disposition of Society, which, upon its part, reserves the power of dissolving the working company, as the sanction of its right of control.

Toward the individuals and families whose labour is the subject of the association, the company makes the following rules:

That every individual employed in the association, whether man, woman, child, old man, head of department, assistant head, workman or apprentice, has an undivided share in the property of the company;

That he has a right to fill any position, of any grade, in the company, according to suitability of sex, age, skill, and length of employment;

That his education, instruction, and apprenticeship should therefore be so directed that, while permitting him to do his share of unpleasant and disagreeable tasks, they may also give variety of work and knowledge, and may assure him, from the period of maturity, an encyclopedic aptitude and a sufficient income;

That all positions are elective, and the by-laws subject to the approval of the members;

That pay is to be proportional to the nature of the position, the importance of the talents, and the extent of responsibility;

That each member shall participate in the gains and in the losses of the company, in proportion to his services;

That each member is free to leave the company, upon settling his account, and paying what he may owe; and reciprocally, the company may take in new members at any time.

These general principles are enough to explain the spirit and scope of this institution, that has no precedent and no model. They furnish the solution of two important problems of social economy, that of collective force, and that of the division of labour.

By participation in losses and gains, by the graded scale of pay and the successive promotion to all grades and positions, the collective force, which is a product of the community, ceases to be a source of profit to a small number of managers and speculators:

it becomes the property of all the workers. At the same time, by a broad education, by the obligation of apprenticeship, and by the co-operation of all who take part in the collective work, the division of labour can no longer be a degradation for the workman: it is, on the contrary, the means of his education and the pledge of his security . . .

Unless democracy is a fraud, and the sovereignty of the People a joke, it must be admitted that each citizen in the sphere of his industry, each municipal, district or provincial council within its own territory, is the only natural and legitimate representative of the Sovereign, and that therefore each locality should act directly and by itself in administering the interests which it includes, and should exercise sovereignty in relation to them. The People is nothing but the organic union of wills that are individually free, that can and should voluntarily work together, but abdicate never. Such union must be sought in the harmony of their interests, not in an artificial centralization, which, far from expressing the collective will, expresses only the antagonisms of individual wills . . .

It is the governments who, pretending to establish order among men, arrange them forthwith in hostile camps, and as their only occupation is to produce servitude at home, their art lies in maintaining war abroad war in fact or war in prospect.

The oppression of peoples and their mutual hatred are two correlative, inseparable facts, which reproduce each other, and which cannot come to an end except simultaneously, by the destruction of their common cause, government . . .

The fundamental, decisive idea of this Revolution, is it not this: NO MORE AUTHORITY, neither in the Church, nor in the State, nor in land, nor in money?

No more Authority! That means something we have never seen, something we have never understood: the harmony of the interest of one with the interest of all; the identity of collective sovereignty and individual Sovereignty.

No more Authority! That means debts paid, servitude abolished, mortgages lifted, rents reimbursed, the expense of worship, justice, and the State suppressed; free credit, equal exchange, free association, regulated value, education, work, property, domicile, low price, guaranteed: no more antagonism, no more war, no more centralization, no more governments, no more priests . . .

No more Authority! That is to say further: free contract in place of arbitrary law; voluntary transactions in place of the control of the State; equitable and reciprocal justice in place of sovereign and distributive justice; rational instead of revealed morals; equilibrium of forces instead of equilibrium of powers; economic unity in place of political centralization."

Now all these texts, in my mind, furnish three versions of the "civilisation vs barbarism" topic in other words and, in what remains of this appendix, I intend to state how that is so and what it amounts to from my point of view (i.e. I intend to demonstrate what is at stake). Another way to put this is as I do in the heading to this final part of my appendix ("the shape of freedom") in that I intend to show here what "freedom" actually looks like (and what it doesn't look like). Of course, there may be readers here who aren't interested in freedom. Well then, friends, you have been reading the wrong book.

And so we come to my literary examples. First, there was Pierre Clastres and *Society Against the State* in which Clastres posits the notion that civilisation, in modern understanding, is a prejudicial value of the civilised who assume, for often dubious

reasons, that their form of society is superior, the natural and normal end goal of any form of civil and political community. People like this, in past and even still present times, can be imagined as those who would force civilisation (which is itself coercion) on people, so dogmatically convinced of both its superiority and necessity are they. (Think Immortan Joe.) Such people perhaps forget that in several cases of contact between the exploring Europeans and the natives of the Americas over the last several hundred years former citizens of “civilisation” willingly disappeared into the wilderness to take up lives with the “barbarians” and “savages” with their imagined “inferior” ways of life. Why would a person born of civilisation’s “superiority” ever choose to reject it for supposed abject barbarity? Why would someone living under Norsefire choose to accept the bargain offered by V? Why would Nux refuse the fellowship of Immortan Joe and the War Boys for brotherhood with some random women and Max? As it is, Clastres’ book is a testament to enculturated ways of life which eschew states and their civilising. Human beings, according to the evidence of this book, do not need to industrialise and technologise and administrate themselves into societies which become a domesticating, coercive threat to life itself, according to this evidence. People do not need to be policed and worked to death or else communal living will fail. The societies in Clastres’ book are neither very authoritarian nor very industrious. They don’t need to be and don’t want to be. Later on, after my quotation but still in the same concluding chapter, he describes the difference between the leisurely barbarian societies and the industrious civilised societies using the following words:

“That force without which the Savages would never surrender their leisure, that force which destroys society insofar as it is primitive society, is the power to compel; it is the power of coercion; it is political power.”

There, then, is your civilisation, anthropologically defined. Civilisation is found wherever some people utilise political power in order to compel others. It changes everything.

And so I come to Richard Rorty who was writing about ethics and distinguishing the definitive, dogmatic compulsion of Pope Benedict from the “satisfying desires” of John Stuart Mill and the “imagination” and “poetry” of George Santayana. I must admit that it makes me chuckle to use Rorty as grist for my mill here as Rorty was just about the most “civilised” man one could imagine when he was alive but here he does service, under my hand, as a pimp for barbarism for, of course, the Pope’s dogmatism, requirement of certainty and his imposition of a fixed order is what is civilised here and the imaginative and poetic satisfying of desires is the barbarism. One of these imagines talking to each other and free play is the most beneficial thing human beings can do to satisfy their desires here whilst the other imagines that forcing all others to what they have already decided is true is the way forward. “Civilisation” for Benedict is something definitive that must be impressed upon others. They should expressly not be allowed to be “relativistic” or to change their minds with circumstances. But the “barbarians” here refuse to recognise anything as definitive. They refuse to accept that anything is either pre-given, a set goal or an unavoidable necessity. Thinking the satisfaction of human desires the primary benefit of human society, they sensibly reason that this may be many different things in many different times and places – and in no way whatsoever based on a pre-determined set of political and economic relationships or fixed, eternal and definitive moral ideas. “What works” here is what matters and it must always be related to what we imagine is the value of what we want. For what we want, our autonomy of desire, is important, if we are to be human, too.

This brings us to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon who correctly views the civilisation-barbarism issue as one of authority versus voluntary cooperation (in his terms, governmentally determined relations or contract relations). Here “contract relations” is my synonym for barbarism since it is the unforced, non-coercive, non-domesticating option. Proudhon imagines society a very barbarian thing where people come together on their own terms, engaging in contract relations (we need not imagine it as formally as he does above) as they see fit in what is essentially a form of free association. People at all times in this society maintain their own autonomy and agency and no one strictly has to deal with anyone else – but Proudhon quite reasonably imagines that they will want to as there is benefit to society that singularity cannot have for itself. We will note how in Howard’s Conan stories the barbarian goes around at will, making and breaking partnerships or friendships as he sees fit. This is what I am hooking onto in using Proudhon’s thoughts as an example here. He essentially formalises such an *ad hoc* nature to life and argues, as a political philosophy, that society is better organised based on such simple things as a need to work together to achieve certain desires and a willingness to engage in it. What is absolutely NOT needed here, and Proudhon gives several reasons why, is authority, government and the State (i.e. civilisation). If you get rid of these things, as Clastres, Rorty and Proudhon all testify, it does not mean you can’t have society. It does not mean you cannot have arts or crafts. It does not mean you cannot have communal projects or communal life. But it does mean these things will then be on your terms and not somebody else’s. And maybe, in the end, that is the most important thing?

“Civilised or barbarian?” then perhaps comes to be more of an important question than you might have thought, at first, that it was. My argument here is that it is a question fundamentally about our freedom and about what our lives, individual and communal, are based on, the circumstances in which they will be carried out. What is at stake in this

question is the shape of our freedom, how much of it we (are allowed to) have, and what we can do with it. The choice, put another way, is between the prison and the outside. Both have their conditions and circumstances but one thing is for sure: they are not the same thing. So choose wisely. And know what it is you're choosing. Life depends on it.

(D). V for Violence, L for Love

If you've been hiding from love

If you've been hiding from love

I can understand where you're coming from

I can understand where you're coming from

If you've suffered enough

If you've suffered enough

I can understand what you're thinking of

I can see the pain that you're frightened of

And I'm only here

To bring you free love

Let's make it clear

That this is free love

No hidden catch, no strings attached

Just free love

No hidden catch, no strings attached

Just free love

I've been running like you
I've been running like you
Now you understand why I'm running scared
Now you understand why I'm running scared
I've been searching for truth
I've been searching for truth
And I haven't been getting anywhere
No, I haven't been getting anywhere

And I'm only here
To bring you free love
Let's make it clear
That this is free love

No hidden catch, no strings attached
Just free love
No hidden catch, no strings attached
Just free love

Hey, girl, you've got to take this moment
Then let it slip away
Let go of complicated feelings
Then there's no price to pay

We've been running from love
We've been running from love

And we don't know what we're doing here

No, we don't know what we're doing here

And we're only here

Sharing our free love

Let's make it clear

That this is free love

No hidden catch, no strings attached

Just free love

No hidden catch, no strings attached

Just free love

No hidden catch, no strings attached

Just free love

No hidden catch, no strings attached

Just free love

(Depeche Mode - Free Love)

If the worlds of *Mad Max*, *V for Vendetta* and *Conan the Barbarian* can be imagined as wastelands populated by "barbarism" then no less can our own world. We might console ourselves, in this respect, because the first three worlds are imaginary, fictional, but hopefully, by now, we know they are much more than that and that fiction, in and through being fiction, is playing an active role in our real lives simply by being what it is and doing what it does. (Why *these* fictions? How do they interact with the culture and values of the times and places they are being watched or read in?) These three fictional wastelands,

then, aren't just settings for stories talking about themselves, they are talking about our world too.

One respect in which they do this is by talking about what I now want to talk about in the fourth part of my middle section of this book: sex. An obvious example here is *Mad Max* and particularly the citadel of Immortan Joe where he keeps women as sexual slaves for both breeding and for commoditising the product of their bodies (milk). Here the slavery and the commoditisation are both seen as coercions and exploitations of women as sexual beings with bodies. (The reality of the Vuvalini also hints at wider sex and gender issues in the Wasteland and that they themselves developed another, seemingly specific, relation of people in general speaks to varying ways of dealing with it.) *V for Vendetta*, on the other hand, begins with an inexperienced teenage Evey attempting to earn money through the sexual use of her body on the streets. She is soon exposed to danger as a result at the hands of violent Fingermen until V swoops in to save her from their threatened sexualised violence. In that world sex and sexuality is also harshly and publicly policed such that those who practice or associate themselves with outlawed forms of sexuality (and, one imagines, also gender) can find themselves imprisoned and murdered. Conan the Barbarian, meanwhile (I refer, of course, largely to Howard's original stories), is almost exclusively told from the point of view of the unreflective male gaze and so where the point of women in the story is to enflame and excite heterosexual male interest. Thus, the voluptuousness and desirability of female characters is often emphasised and they can be regarded as desired prizes for deeds of masculine valour or endeavour. "Getting the girl" is a real thing in Conan's world and it a heterosexual world.

But what about our world and its fictions of sex and sexuality? I want to focus on something very specific here in my fourth section of this queer apocalypse: sex, and sex

as love, but also, more specifically, the commoditisation, commercialisation and capitalisation of sex, something I see as a destructive, violent and certainly unnecessary form of human relations, a form of human relations with malign, rather than benign, consequences. Specifically, I see it as a form of "anti-love", something actually at odds with sex and sexuality itself since sex and capitalism have completely different (if not entirely opposed) purposes. In this, I consider myself consistent with my foregrounded anarchist and queer credentials, such as they are (as well as anti-work and anti-capitalist ones I may not have touted so loudly), and as championing the cause of sex as a loving (but not necessarily coupled) act, a socially strengthening act, an act with a social context rather than one as a commodity or something of only individualistic import. (Sex as something to do with care?) In doing so, I recognise that past anarchists, such as Emma Goldman, Émile Armand and many other free love activists of the past, have recognised the importance of the sexual issue for the anarchist ethos and that there can be no freedom without sexual freedom. In fact, as we see in the America that exists today at my time of writing (and in other places with similar, if differently motivated, moralities too), sexualities and sexual practices (as well as whole genders) can easily be outlawed by the authoritarian, and gender-sex (to use Anne Fausto-Sterling's term) is almost always one of the first things authoritarians move to control. Sexual freedom, and understanding what that really is and means, is a major part of any anarchist concept of freedom, fully understood and this requires us to understand why sex capitalism is not freedom.

And so the thing that animates me particularly here is "sex capitalism". It is important in this case to note, from the off, that sex capitalism is simply a subset of capitalism. Any and all criticisms of capitalism, simply put, are then also criticisms of sex capitalism, specifically put. This is merely because sex capitalism, as a form of capitalism, is itself capitalism. If you would criticise capitalism then you must also criticise sex capitalism too

as a form of the larger phenomenon. If "there is no ethical consumption under capitalism" - as I often hear people repeat - then there can be no ethical consumption under sex capitalism either. Capitalism, understood like this, is a totally encompassing social FORM OF RELATIONS that has specific consequences and effects. It serves particular purposes and not others. It is in no way any more or less naturalistic, as a form of relations, than many other forms which could similarly be imagined. And, since it is unethical, as many agree, the point is TO ERASE IT AS A FORM OF HUMAN RELATIONS rather than perpetuating it. It is not "the best we can do". It might actually be the worst we can do.

Capitalism, simply put, is exploitation writ large, the violently destructive coercion of those who want to dominate and control a market for something thought of as a service or, better, a resource by creating an economic and political system of relations in order to facilitate it. The way a capitalist usually proceeds, in brief, is by acquiring said service or resource (or the ability to provide it), structuring and controlling its availability (in order to be able to attenuate its price) and advertising its desirability (hopefully to the point at which the imagined customer base thinks it cannot live without it). Capitalism works to enrich private entities rather than public societies or communities and, as such, it is very good at creating disparities of wealth and power which have destructive social and political effects. It is always based on the notion of legal property by which it claims the right to own, and so be able to sell, the service or resource concerned in the first place.

This, in fact, shows how artificial the logic of capitalism actually is for it is based in the dubious notion of the ownership of natural resources that it cannot reasonably be asserted anyone really owns to begin with. (Oil? Gas? Water? Land? Forms of life? Images? Ideas?) Once that dubious notion be granted, however, the right to do what one wants with that resource, to the exclusion of anyone else, is given away in states in which the

law of property is king. It has in fact often been argued that the liberal governments of nation states only really exist in order to guarantee property rights, so important are such rights to this way of life. It is something basic to the capitalist system of relations which has been evident in the world now for around 400 years.

We might think about this by asking a few questions about things in the context of capitalism:

1. Who owns the thing for sale and what is the basis of their ownership?
2. Who stands to gain from a sale and how?
3. What human relations are instigated by this and what are their consequences and effects?
4. What does "ownership" or "property" actually mean and is it fair or reasonable?
5. What happens under capitalism if you are unable to generate financial wealth for yourself?
6. What are the duties of a capitalist as a capitalist?

Alternatively, we might consider anthropologist David Graeber's take on capitalism from his *The Utopia of Rules*:

"Capitalism is not something imposed on us by some outside force. It only exists because every day we wake up and continue to produce it. If we woke up one morning and all collectively decided to produce something else, then we wouldn't have capitalism anymore. This is the ultimate revolutionary question: what are the conditions that would have to exist to enable us to do this—to just wake up and imagine and produce something else?"

So what I absolutely don't want to do in my discussion (which is part of a "queer apocalypse"), in that case, is remotely assume that capitalism, or its relations, either is, ever was, or should be, normal (which is at least historically ridiculous). This is because I am convinced that assuming the tenets of capitalism as normal, and reproducing them throughout our lives and relationships (which is what we are constantly being coerced to do), only ever leads to one end to this story. Can you guess what it is? Its global death - and that is not a sexy subject. Capitalism, an invention of Western Europe since about the 16th and 17th centuries, exploits a resource until it is gone and then moves onto the next one. Its only purpose is exploitation of that resource for profit through the instantiation and maintenance of a political and economic system of legal relations composed, primarily, of seller-owners and buyer-consumers. (There are also middle men like brokers or insurance people who exist merely to cream off profit for themselves as adjuncts to the basic binary of owner and consumer.) It has no plan for what happens after the resource is fully exploited beyond finding another resource to exploit. In this context, work and the worker are merely means to that end, a necessary cost of, and means to, production. Workers are paid a remuneration in exchange for their labour but you don't need to have an all-seeing eye to be able to realise that employers look to pay workers the minimum necessary as part of this equation and are looking to replace them with more "cost effective" solutions all the time. (The latest one is AI "workers".) "Cost effective" here simply means "that which maximises profit" or creates the most "surplus value". Quite where this profit motive came from, historically, I cannot exactly say. But it seems manifestly obvious that it cannot possibly be in everybody's best interest. Under capitalism, the seller-owner has interests only to maximise the profit they can make from a resource. It is a private interest and all other interests are secondary to it.

A term you may have heard reference to before is the "sex industry" and this term rubs me up the wrong way for I do not think of sex as an "industry". Talking of it as an "industry" makes me think of sex factories that are churning out sex and the fact is that, depressingly or unsurprisingly, these places exist. (Watched porn made in a completely white room? That's a sex factory.) But what view of sex is that propagating? Sex capitalism is then a matter of producing "sex product", something that is a sex commodity that can be retailed. Sex has now become a discreet, objective item, content, that can be ordered or requested or browsed and, most importantly, consumed. Like a tin of beans or a new bath mat. There are companies that sell sex directly and there are others that take a cut of the earnings of sex workers (whom they oversee) by virtue of providing the platform for them to sell their sex products. (These can be legal or illegal entities and its not always clear which is which.) Sex, under this understanding, is now created as a particular sort of relationship, a BUSINESS relationship, a commercial transaction. It is a business relationship about sexualised bodies and parodying the sexual act by providing images of it and stimulating the sexual imaginations and feelings of the consumers. In this relationship the seller-owner and the buyer-consumer may never even see each other face to face. Here the sexual act, at once so intimate and seemingly embodied, is conjured in illusory form and expected to act as a substitute as the capitalist and their coerced workers artificially enflame their customers' sexual desire for profit. Its like imagining the best, most succulent meal you can imagine but, instead of making and eating it, buying a video of someone else eating it which they have made for you to take its place. This, you may agree, is hardly genuine nourishment. And its certainly not the same thing.

But there is more to it than this: there is the patriarchal control of sex and sexuality as a further, intersectional background to the capitalist world we live in. Various different patriarchies in various differing locations want, and try, to control sex whether in terms of

access to the products of sex capitalism (see laws like the recent UK Online Safety Act) or in terms of what sexuality you are allowed to be (many countries still ban and punish being gay and/or trans) to who may or may not have sex (age of consent or incest laws) and how the consequences of sex may be dealt with (abortion, birth control). Here sexual autonomy over one's own body may not always be assumed, depending upon your location. The basic premise that sexual consent between two or more people is enough to have sex should not necessarily be assumed either. Certain puritanical people have a concomitant hatred for the naked human body as well which complicates things for consenting adults in places where they may be seen by others. Given the importance of the Internet in the more affluent parts of the world, that sex may be viewed online (and is apparently the most popular thing on it) is also a target for the puritans, religious zealots and simple authoritarians who are constantly haunted by the thought that someone, somewhere is having a good time.

The feminist group Femen, which originated in Ukraine but has gradually spread more internationally, see all this as a feminist issue of women's freedom. Their "about us" page on their website, femen.org, which is not written in perfect English, reads as follows:

"In the beginning, there was the body, feeling of the woman's body, feeling of joy because it is so light and free. Then there was injustice, so sharp that you feel it with your body, it immobilizes the body, hinders its movements, and then you find yourself your body's hostage. And so you turn your body against this injustice, mobilizing every body's cell to struggle against the patriarchy and humiliation. You tell the world: Our God is a Woman!"

Our Mission is Protest!

Our Weapon are bare breasts!

And so FEMEN is born and sextremism is set off.

FEMEN

FEMEN is an international women's movement of brave topless female activists painted with the slogans and crowned with flowers.

FEMEN female activists are the women with special training, physically and psychologically ready to implement the humanitarian tasks of any degree of complexity and level of provocation. FEMEN activists are ready to withstand repressions against them and are propelled by the ideological cause alone. FEMEN is the special force of feminism, its spearhead militant unit, modern incarnation of fearless and free Amazons.

FEMEN ideology

Sextremism

Atheism

Feminism

FEMEN world outlook

We live in the world of male economic, cultural and ideological occupation. In this world, a woman is a slave, she is stripped of the right to any property but above all she is stripped of ownership of her own body. All functions of the female body are harshly controlled and

regulated by patriarchy. Separated from the woman, her body is an object to monstrous patriarchal exploitation, animated by production of heirs, surplus profits, sexual pleasures and pornographic shows. Complete control over the woman's body is the key instrument of her suppression; the woman's sexual demarche is the key to her liberation. Manifestation of the right to her body by the woman is the first and the most important step to her liberation. Female nudity, free of patriarchal system, is a grave-digger of the system, militant manifesto and sacral symbol of women's liberation.

FEMEN's naked attacks is a naked nerve of the historic woman-system conflict, its most visual and appropriate illustration. Activist's naked body is the undisguised hatred toward the patriarchal order and new aesthetics of women's revolution.

FEMEN's Goal:

Complete victory over patriarchy

FEMEN's Objectives:

- by strength of courage and personal example, to initiate global women's mob law over patriarchy as the historically first, and last, existing form of slavery.*
- to provoke patriarchy into open conflict by forcing it to disclose its aggressive anti-human nature to fully discredit it in the eyes of history.*

– to ideologically undermine the fundamental institutes of patriarchy – dictatorship, sex-industry, and church – by putting these institutes through subversive trolling to force them to strategic surrender.

– to promote new revolutionary female sexuality as opposed to the patriarchal erotic and pornography.

– to instill in modern women culture of active opposition to the evil and of struggle for justice.

– to create the most influential and combat-effective women's union in the world.

FEMEN's Requirements:

– immediate political deposition of all dictatorial regimes creating unbearable living conditions for women, first of all, theocratic Islamic states practicing Shari'ah and other forms of sadism regarding women;

– complete extermination of prostitution as an egregious form of exploitation of women by criminalizing the clients, investors and organizers of slave-trade. To recognize that sex-industry is the most large-scale and long-term genocide against women;

– to universally and completely separate the church from the state and to prohibit any intervention of the religious institutions in the civic, sex and reproductive lives of modern women.

FEMEN's Tactics Is Sextremism

Sextremism is a fundamentally new form of women's feminist actionism developed by FEMEN.

Sextremism is female sexuality rebelling against patriarchy and embodied in the extremal political direct action events. Sexist style of the actions is a way to destruct the patriarchal understanding of what is the destination of female sexuality to the benefit of the great revolutionary mission. Extremal nature of sextremism demonstrates intellectual, psychological and physical superiority of female activists from FEMEN over the bandogs of patriarchy. Unsanctioned format of the sextremism events represents the historical right of the woman to make her protest anywhere at any time and not to concert her action with the patriarchal law-enforcing structures. Sextremism is the woman's mockery of vulgar male extremism and its bloody mayhems and a cult of terror. Sextremism is a non-violent but highly aggressive form of provocation; it is an all-powerful demoralizing weapon undermining the foundations of the old political ethics and rotten patriarchal culture.

FEMEN's Symbols

Flower crown is a symbol of femininity and proud in submission, a crown of heroism.

Body-poster is the truth delivered by the body by means of nudity and meanings inscribed on it.

FEMEN's logotype is Φ , a Cyrillic letter, the shape of which is similar to women's breasts that are the key symbol of the women's movement FEMEN.

FEMEN's slogan: My Body Is My Weapon!

Structure and Activities

International women's movement FEMEN legally operates in the democratic societies and illegally operates in the countries controlled by the dictatorial regimes. FEMEN is registered as an international organization and is now working to legalize the national FEMEN-groups throughout the world. Today, the movement FEMEN is represented by national branches all over Europe and is interested in permanent development of new locations through involvement of new activists. Female extremists are trained in the training centers created by the movement in Ukraine and France. The movement is managed by the Coordination Council which includes the founders and the most prominent activists of the organization."

As you will imagine from my quoting of this material, I think there are some points to note from it that are relevant to my subject of sex capitalism. The most important, I think, is that Femen see the "sex industry" as a patriarchal formation and as something as dangerous and threatening to women as "dictatorship" (the State? political authoritarianism? economic capitalism?) and the Church. Note that this isn't simply focused on Western regimes either as "theocratic Islamic states" are mentioned explicitly. Femen in fact go so far as to say that the "sex-industry is the most large-scale and long-term genocide against women", essentially the sexual face of a capitalism which will destroy forests and other natural habitats without a second thought for any of the life there. They also link this with "prostitution" (something we may describe as paying, or being paid, for a sexual favour or service in which women are a sexual resource) and they refer to that as "an egregious form of exploitation of women" and as a "slave-trade". They wish to criminalise all those who make use of, invest in or otherwise organise such

business and to "ideologically undermine" sex capitalism as an existing entity and an imagined legitimate form of existence. Their viewpoint here is clearly systemic and concerned with the wider implications and consequences of sex capitalist relations. Not only do individual women suffer as a result of sex capitalism but women as a whole (in the view of Femen) do too (perhaps, one imagines, because they become a sexual commodity). Their entire ideology is summed up as freedom for women from a nexus of patriarchal and capitalist dominated social relations which are centred on sex as the crucial aspect of humanity to be dominated, exploited and controlled. Consequently, it is obvious that their means of symbolising and expressing their freedom is to bare their breasts and to taunt their opponents with the actions of a deliberative and purposive sexual liberation THAT CAN NEVER BE FOR SALE. Become what you want to see.

This is just one example of people taking their sexual freedom into their own hands today. But, ironically, there would perhaps be many involved in "the porn industry" who think that what they are doing is the same thing - in direct contradiction of the views of Femen and others like them. (Consider, for example, the essays and arguments of the various contributors to *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*. Here, as only one example from the book, such a well known porn performer as the vastly experienced Nina Hartley can argue that porn is "an effective vehicle for sexual role-modelling and education".) Ultimately, this difference of opinion harks back to the fabled "sex wars" (with which I will interact later on, making use of texts from those on opposed sides of the argument) of feminism, beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, when there were "sex positive" and "sex worker exclusionary" feminists who had sometimes bitter disagreements about porn specifically and what it meant, or didn't mean, in terms of women. Some could only see porn as the male degradation of women and their use as mere objects for visceral male gratification. Others argued it was sexually liberating, of a

part with personal freedom, and empowering and that a woman, just like any man, should be allowed to do with their bodies as they liked.

The systemic issues here (and their wider consequences in society - such as their entanglement with capitalism as I am highlighting) were not always necessarily addressed in these arguments and sometimes the issue was painted as simply one of personal choice and consent or "free speech". But, when cases such as that of Traci Lords appeared (Lords performed whilst underage and told no one), it was easy for some to point out that "the porn industry" didn't exactly care that much who they were using so long as they signed on the dotted line. Anti-porn campaigners of the past, such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, presented rafts of evidence (through multiple witnesses) of the harm done by "the sex industry" which courts of law did not necessarily refute in their judgments. We will dig into this shortly.

For me the issue that motivates this discussion is a personal one and its not necessarily one you may have seen before. I can't decide for myself in thinking about it whether its an ethical issue or not but that might not matter that much in any case. That it is an issue of any kind seems enough. (I think, on reflection, its certainly a question of ethos.) My issue is concerned with sex and what it is for, what it does, why it exists, and with setting it within a personal *and social* imaginary. In discussing this, I want to bring in the first of three discussion partners I will utilise in this particular chapter, Emma Goldman (the other two are the cultural anthropologist and doyenne and documenter of "leatherfolk", Gayle Rubin, and the now deceased anti-porn, but apparently pro-trans, feminist, Andrea Dworkin).

Goldman has a very high opinion of sex consequent upon her own life and proclivities but also her documented interest in the sexology of her day (in which she was well read) and her integration of sex with her anarchy in an agenda of personal and political freedom. She saw this agenda as requiring "the entire change of our present social structure" and sex and sexuality, appropriately and contextually understood, was a central plank of that agenda because, as she saw it, sexuality was a central plank of human being, individually and socially speaking. (Goldman was one who fought for free love, in print and in the streets, whether inside or outside of marriage - something she despised - and was actually jailed in 1916 in relation to teaching women about birth control. One of her lovers, who was a doctor, performed an abortion on a teenager of her acquaintance, who had shared her home, in 1911 when it was definitively illegal. Goldman acted on her beliefs as that which she wanted to see in the world, often at cost to her liberty.) In a fragmentary and incomplete essay found in her literary remains, "The Element of Sex in Life", Goldman lays out the importance she ascribes to sex in the human being and in human society:

"Sex is a primary biological function of all life above the lowest. Its characters and qualities have an ancient lineage. Its impulse is as real as is the force which makes the tides to ebb and flow. It has profoundly influenced structure and behavior. It is a fundamental element of all higher life, its external characters a neat advertising dodge of nature by which she sells her wares and thereby insures her family.

To sex we owe more than poetry; we owe the song of birds, all vocal music and the voice itself, the plumage that comes to supreme glory in the bird of paradise, the mane of the lion, the blush of the maiden, the beard of man, and all higher forms of life in plant and animal worlds. It is woven into every fabric of human life and lays its fingers on every custom...

Sex is more powerful than all decisions...

while religionists and purists cling to their fetish that sex must not be "indulged" in, as they term the perfectly natural expression, modern biologists and psychologists have torn the veil from all the nonsense pertaining to sex. Whole libraries have been filled with works that treat the subject with understanding and depth and show that there has been an inadequate realization of the tremendous energy back of the sex instinct on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of the biological provisions for the release of this energy along channels not specifically sexual. It is probably absolutely correct to speak of the sex instinct as the creative instinct, and it is equally true that any outlet which offers the emotional satisfaction that comes from creative endeavor has the capability of neutralizing the needs back of the creative craving...

sex life, in its various forms, is vital to social welfare, just as it is significant for... personal growth and development...

To interpret the sex life of the unmarried one must recognize that there are two functions of sex:

One, the biologic, which has procreation as a goal—involving some intellectual but more emotional processes in the interest of race preservations.

The other function consists of the promotion of social growth through human relationships. This involves the play function and erotic activity, with or without a procreative goal. There are two bases for the energy of the sexual drive—one, conscious, directed, guided,

subjected to ethical controls; the other, unconscious, instinctual, impulsive, reacting to stimuli, but not subject to reason...

Unmarried adults are approaching sex as a fact rather than a theory. They are accepting their sexual organization frankly as an instrument for personal growth and emotional completion with social stabilization, rather than hypocritically as a function designed by divine plan only for the procreation of pure beings whose excuse for living was that they might die in purity to attain happiness in a world to come.

They appreciate that sex is the source of life, but believe that a sexless life is a mockery after biologic maturation, because it is contrary to nature, since sex is also an expression of psychological factors that socialize individuals and lead them to forsake unmarried life for a marriage in harmony with the laws and customs of their age.

All erotic play is genetically related to courtship, but courtship is subject to social control. Hence, the sex life of the normal young unmarried adult, whatever it may be, is preparation for the perfection of mating, the promotion of personal happiness and adjustment in some form of marriage, whether free and unconventional common-law or according to civil or religious rite.

Because I so completely agree with this viewpoint and because I know the disastrous and tragic result of the Puritan idea of sex, I find it imperative to call your attention to the need of treating the sex question frankly and without the subterfuge usually employed when referring to the subject. With the greatest and freest spirits and poet Walt Whitman I say, "Where sex is missing everything is missing." Let us get rid of the mock modesty so prevalent

on the surface of polite society. Let us liberate sex from falsehood and degradation and let us realize that sex is a dominant factor for health and harmony in life and in art."

Put simply, Goldman imagined sexuality an entirely natural and positive endowment, broadly equivalent with, and motivating of, all creative endeavour, and entirely constitutive of personal and social health. Marriage had nothing to do with this and Goldman was neither squeamish nor moralist about this believing, as did Freud, that human beings are sexual beings from birth to death. Satisfaction of sexual desire thus carries both personal and social value and purpose as a vital aspect of human life itself. Sex is a matter of care and of love, those beneficial salves upon the human being as they pass through life. Consequently, all through her career one of the distinguishing factors of her activity is her overt sexual engagement, something she noted was what often riled her critics the most. Goldman saw sex as a personal and social good, something that had a fundamental role to play in cultural and political health. In Goldman's political Utopia sexual shame would be an impossible thing for all would have accepted its natural function and necessity and averred from its cultural and political persecution as freedom and physical love became one.

This analysis, in turn, is important for my own formation of the issue under discussion in this chapter because I accept Goldman's understanding absolutely and enthusiastically. I see physical love, sex, as a personal and social good in which "marriage" is irrelevant. Rather, like more ancient or uncivilised (not an insult) peoples have demonstrated in their various polities over centuries or even millennia, I see the deployment of sexuality, the practice of sex, as an agent or means of care generally throughout human community. I see the point of sex as love. I see physical love as (although not restricted to) sex. And this becomes a problem, as we will see, when that "love" is turned into a commodity or a

commercialised consumer product, or a parody or illusion of itself, something one can buy or rent or experience for an amount of time because one has made a payment. Because that is not love. A consumer transaction is neither love nor a thing which instantiates a love relation. It is the pretence of love. For personal gain. An exploitation of love and how it feels. It is anti-love and does not come along with the benefits of actual physical love which are more than temporary bodily sensations or the purchasing of a moment. Participating personally in sex and watching sex at a distance are not the same thing and do not have the same consequences. They may, in fact, have opposed consequences. The relationship of the financial transaction and the relationship of love are entirely different things with different contexts, meanings and consequences. If Goldman (and her sexological sources) are right when they say that sex has personal and social benefits in and through its physical reality and the experience of that, then nothing pornographic, much less a "sex industry", can claim the same benefits. For it is not the same thing. It leads to different consequences and creates different relationships.

Goldman herself was well aware of this and set sex in a patriarchal and capitalist social context in which women could be made victims of the sexual impulse and its desire. Her essay "The Traffic in Women" from 1910 discusses white prostitution (her society apparently did not worry too much until it was white women who were selling their sex) but not from the position that prostitution was desirable. She took a social and political view rather than the conservatively libertarian, free speech, "its muh rights" kind of view. Goldman wanted a society in which it was perfectly acceptable for anyone who wanted sex to have sex with anyone else to their, and society's, common good. It should seem obvious that in such a society prostitution would be entirely unnecessary for in it no one would need to BUY sex to begin with. Thus, she here calls prostitution "a widespread evil" (and had done so for many years previous to this - for example, in "Anarchy and the Sex

Question" in 1896). But, and here's the important part, it was evil because the business of selling sex is itself part of a socially evil system necessitated by the political and economic systems of the time - patriarchy and capitalism. Goldman sees prostitutes themselves as COERCED VICTIMS of this system. She does not blame them for their prostitution but blames those who create and maintain the economic and political systems of the time for creating prostitutes:

"What is really the cause of the trade in women? Not merely white women, but yellow and black women as well. Exploitation, of course; the merciless Moloch of capitalism that fattens on underpaid labor, thus driving thousands of women and girls into prostitution."

People gotta live, as many of today's online sex workers will quickly inform you. And if that means selling sexual favours of one kind and another then it must be done. Such acts are the results, so Goldman maintains, of an economic system of relations in which it is sell your sex or die. And no prostitute or sex worker is to blame for that. "Our industrial system leaves most women no alternative except prostitution," claims Goldman (who includes "marriage" under prostitution), and the truth of those words would also be borne out in many cases today as women in droves flock to sites where they can show themselves sexually to make some money. Porn companies, too, are booming and they are always on the look out for "fresh meat". (Some porn sites will actively call the women "meat" as an advertising strategy as in the site "Asian Street Meat".) In the process, women as a class become sexualised and sexual objects. They are things obtainable for units of currency in a sexual economy, of worth only as things and experiences. The situation is not quite as Goldman describes it in her own essay for, in our day, marriage is somewhat less common and divorce is much easier in many cases, but she was and is right to say that "Nowhere is woman treated according to the merit of her work but rather as a sex." That is, as a sex object. Like a sex toy. Something that exists to gratify sexually. And,

most importantly, Goldman makes the point that women are put in this position by capitalism, the need to achieve some measure of personal independence by being part of a patriarchally dominated economic hierarchy, a set of definable relations, by being exploited for work so that another can acquire surplus value. The porn company gets far more money from a video it produces than the porn actress does (or the porn actor for that matter). The Only Fans company gets a proportion of anything the Only Fans model makes simply for hosting them (on terms of their, but not the model's, choosing).

At an even more macro level, every single porn performer or sex worker is only doing what they do because of the ABSOLUTE REQUIREMENT to earn money to survive in their society. But that does not have to be the case. Other means of common existence are imaginable and possible, ones that don't even involve money (ones, ironically, in which sex itself, acts of physical love, might be the "currency" in a very different conception of community). Thus, the social, economic and political reality determines the lives of those that live within it. People are workers OF ANY KIND because they are forced to be. Can we then say that all sex work is, in some sense, coerced sex because all work is coerced work? Would you do your job if no one was paying you to do it? Would you do your job if no one needed to pay you to do it? But then your situation would be entirely different. Your motivation would not be money which, funnily enough, is not the motivation in sex as it biologically occurs. Sex as love is done for love and for the care it manifests. Sex makes us feel good personally and socially. Under current conditions it often has to be coerced and, as a result, becomes a form of violence. But it could be that we could imagine a world where it was naturally and regularly given and became something that could never be commoditised. It would be a better, and less exploitative, world.

And so my problem with "the sex industry" becomes more apparent. Its not about love. Its about greed. Its not about care (of the self or others). Its about the forced acquisition of financial wealth. I often in fact remark that the many many people you can see posting videos to sex sites don't love sex so much as they love sex that makes money. Their cameras (and their violence) ARE NECESSARY TO THE ACT. I don't see that as the kind of personally and socially constructive sex that Goldman talks about but as something socially and personally destructive as many see capitalism as being - for it is sex that is more about capitalism than it is about Utopianism or anarchy (or even human community). Sex as sex is love but sex for money is commerce. Sex as love is freely given and received; sex as business is an exploited necessity which locks up its participants in images forever as property. And even a sex worker can tell the difference between the two when they separate out their working life from their private life or they complain, as they sometimes do in public, that the male talent assumed he could fuck the girl after the shoot as well as during it. In a world of demarcated work time and demarcated play time one thing you know is that relations are being policed to a particular kind of standard.

Goldman assumes, as you would imagine she would, that women quite naturally have sexual drives, needs and desires. But she argues that the political and economic circumstances of the societies they live in forces them to commercialise their sex for survival purposes, something which benefits a predatory system of relations more than it benefits them. In a capitalist patriarchy, when sex is a product then women (in general) are for sale. But its a game they can't win, so at least part of society imagines, because then, so at least part of society says, they have become whores, sluts, slags, bikes, holes, meat to fuck, dirty, tramps and cumrags. There are an amazing amount of women on Only Fans and similar sites who HIDE THEIR FACES. Why? You know why. The morality of our civilisation forces women (and others) to become sex objects AND THEN IT CONDEMNS

AND JUDGES THEM FOR IT. They are made into good capitalists but also into dirty, unspeakable capitalists, vulnerable capitalists. They are fucked both ways. This particularly affects women who are, for entirely dubious patriarchal reasons only, supposed to be more chaste than men. This boils down to simple misogyny when a man might imagine forcing a woman to her knees for his pleasure but gets to call her a cockslut, and value her accordingly, when she is done. Men always win, women can only lose. Such is the morality of standard patriarchal heterosexuality under capitalism. The man is dominant, the woman inferior. Know your place. (Sometimes the women hiding their faces subsequently start showing them, an example would be "NoFaceMom". In cases like that I assume its because they have begun making the kind of money which takes the desire to hide away. In capitalism success is never shameful. But should it be?) But then capitalist patriarchy is a very hypocritical place and Goldman is wise to this:

"Society considers the sex experiences of a man as attributes of his general development, while similar experiences in the life of a woman are looked upon as a terrible calamity, a loss of honor and of all that is good and noble in a human being. This double standard of morality has played no little part in the creation and perpetuation of prostitution. It involves the keeping of the young in absolute ignorance on sex matters, which alleged "innocence," together with an overwrought and stifled sex nature, helps to bring about a state of affairs that our Puritans are so anxious to avoid or prevent."

Keeping people ignorant of their bodies and of sex MAKES PROSTITUTES. Or, it makes more prostitutes than would otherwise be made. As in cases where Goldman is arguing in favour of the rigorous sexual education of children, she makes the point that ignorance of sex is no protection from the sexually predatory or from the downsides of sexual involvement itself. What is a protection, however, is a thorough, frank and open sexual

education - and from an age before hormones are racing around youthful bodies giving them thoughts and impulses they have absolutely no framework for understanding or appropriating sensibly for themselves. But this is exactly what the judgemental puritan or controlling authoritarian would not want to do, thinking that the very mention of sex is itself harmful, dirty and shameful. And so, reasons Goldman, their very puritan behaviour goes on to produce the very things they seek to avoid due only to the incarcerated ignorance in which they wish to keep people.

Goldman herself never recommends ignorance as a solution to anything and her own active and conscientious study of the various sexologists of her time shows that this is not mere words but her own active practice. That she does and teaches this as a protection is interesting in a context in which she argues that the economic and patriarchal system which produces prostitutes (for example, by inducing in people the capitalist desire to acquire capitalist products they then need to afford) makes women potential victims of sex all round. This can include at least morally, medically (venereal disease), economically, legally and in terms of being extorted, for example, by police who take a back-hander NOT to arrest them or prison officers who desire sex because prostitutes are thought of simply as sex dispensers. Goldman's stance, however, is clear: society produces prostitutes through its political and economic social conditions. It is a matter of regular human relations and it is these that must change, systemically, if you would have the prostitute disappear:

"An educated public opinion, freed from the legal and moral hounding of the prostitute, can alone help to ameliorate present conditions. Wilful shutting of eyes and ignoring of the evil as a social factor of modern life, can but aggravate matters. We must rise above our foolish notions of "better than thou," and learn to recognize in the prostitute a product of social

conditions. Such a realization will sweep away the attitude of hypocrisy, and insure a greater understanding and more humane treatment. As to a thorough eradication of prostitution, nothing can accomplish that save a complete transvaluation of all accepted values, especially the moral ones — coupled with the abolition of industrial slavery."

The cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin, a participant in the "sex wars" of the 1970s and 1980s (and one of those personally targeted by "anti-porn feminists" as a participant in, and scholar of, leatherfolk and BDSM), carries on the analysis begun by Goldman and in a landmark essay with the same title: "The Traffic in Women". Her essay is subtitled "Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex", something which at least recognises that "sex" is a matter of a "political economy". Here she is interested in "women's oppression and social subordination" and particularly with how we imagine it came about and is maintained. For it is only on the basis of such analysis that an appropriate course of action to ameliorate and eventually destroy "gender hierarchy" can be fashioned. Here, in her first paragraph, Rubin notes that "If sexism is a by-product of capitalism's relentless appetite for profit then sexism would wither away in the advent of a successful socialist revolution." Rubin here presumably imagines that, in the advent of "socialism" (a dubious and multivalent term), the realities of capitalism would be annihilated and sexism along with it. (Such a notion is false in my view and denies history such as that of the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 where the creation of socialist and anarchist formations *did not* eradicate sexism and, in fact, required feminist formations to fight against it such as *Mujeres Libres*.) Rubin is, in her essay, interacting with Karl Marx and Engels, with Marcel Mauss, Lévi-Strauss and Monique Wittig, with Freud, Lacan and psychoanalysts, in what is fundamentally a study of society (or varying societies) as the basis and context for how sex is itself interpreted (and so, quite literally, "materialised" in reality).

This is interesting to me because it provides academic foundations for my view that digital sex workers on a website are not abstract individuals acting in abstract space, libertarians animated only by notions of free speech, free will and free choice. Who you are, what you can do, what you feel the need for, how you imagine yourself and your relations to others, how you imagine sex, and the effects of all of that and more, are *not* set in abstract space. They are set in specific space, specific time and space, in fact, and so given specific materiality and actuality. Their values and meanings are, thus, determined, conditioned, accordingly. Any articulation you might give, or want to give, to these things, will only be done in relation to what has already been done and is socially, culturally and politically prevalent and will be the means for understanding what you do. The world and its meanings and values, in other words, are socially generated and derived. Everything is the result of a relation. (Foucault builds on this to talk about always active "power relations", for example.) In terms of Gayle Rubin's ideas here, then, "We need to study each society to determine the exact mechanisms by which particular conventions of sexuality are produced and maintained." Sexes, sex and sexualities are SYSTEMS OF CONDITIONED SOCIAL RELATIONS and, ultimately, what that means, as we will see, is that this system of relations must be reorganised by means of political action. As far as I am concerned in this book, that will be politically understood LOVE ACTION (and "love action" politically understood).

Or, as Rubin writes:

"what is a domesticated woman? A female of the species. The one explanation is as good as the other. A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human Dictaphone in certain relations. Torn from these

relationships, she is no more the helpmate of man than gold in itself is money . . . and so on. What, then, are these relationships by which a female becomes an oppressed woman?"

The sense in that latter question is that these relationships are "a systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products". What, we might ask in the light of this, is pornography? It is largely "a systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions women as pornographic products". That is, it sets women, as pornographic objects, in a certain relation to the outside world. A pornographic woman is both seller (of her sex) and product (a sexual product). So she is placed in a capitalistic and patriarchal relation for her worth within that system is only in proportion to how much (and for how much) she can be sold as something sexual. Capitalism arranges an economic relation in which financial value is uppermost. Often the task in an Only Fans type situation is to hook yourself up to other users to create hype and popularity from "collabs" which will generate the attention that gets eyeballs. Viewers (or more likely the model themselves) may want to see a particular woman fucked by particular well known (or well endowed) men in the industry, for example. (Dredd sticks out - literally.) And so you get a merry-go-round of women all being fucked by the same guys who are seen as desirable because they are known and popular. Which I'm sure the guys, now flooded with the attentions of women, love much the same as Elon Musk or Donald Trump love being the centre of attention.

I don't look at this in a "good for them" type of way, however, for I am looking at things politically, culturally and socially. I am imagining these are relevant contexts. I am imagining all these women and men collaborating and thinking to myself: will this change the world? Is this the sexuality that changes the world? And the answer is: no, it won't change the world (even, in fact, as it is creating it in a certain way). It is simply activity

reproducing capitalist, patriarchal (and, most often, heterosexual) relations and setting them up as a desirable standard or goal in life. (If you are a woman and you want to get ahead then make yourself sexually attractive and arrange to get fucked by Dredd, on camera, for money.) It is then adding to the misery, destruction and death capitalism is producing and will continue to produce. Life is not about isolated, random, porn-famous people and who they fuck (and which you can see if you pay \$20-\$30). But it is affected by them and the ideals they publicise in and through their ever more popular activity as people forced by capitalist realities to work. It is relevant to "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied." If you are the member of a species which satisfies its sexual needs commercially then that is different to if you are a member of a species (or culture) that doesn't. Rubin suggests that this is something to do not only with capitalism but with our "sex/gender system". She wants to define what that is and so, in diagnosing it, become more able to attenuate it in terms of political needs and desires. Under capitalism, workers, including sex workers, are just means to surplus value or profit. In a sex/gender system, different forms of value or power may apply. In both situations both value and power are relevant items. Historically speaking, both together have led to the male dominance known as patriarchy which enables women (and others) to be turned into saleable sex commodities (by others or themselves makes no difference to my social and cultural argument) or parodied in and as full size sex dolls which at least some men treat as if they were real women. This phenomenon did not just come from nowhere or drop out of the sky as a natural reality. As Rubin explains this, exegizing Karl Marx:

"Capitalism has taken over and rewired notions of male and female which pre-date it by centuries. No analysis of the reproduction of labor power under capitalism can explain foot-

binding, chastity belts, or any of the incredible array of Byzantine, fetishized indignities—let alone the more ordinary ones—that have been inflicted upon women in various times and places. The analysis of the reproduction of labor power does not even explain why it is usually women rather than men who do domestic work in the home... What is necessary to reproduce the worker is determined in part by the biological needs of the human organism, in part by the physical conditions of the place in which it lives, and in part by cultural tradition... It is precisely [a] 'historical and moral element' [Marx's phrase] which determines that a 'wife' is among the necessities of a worker, that women rather than men do housework, and that capitalism is heir to a long tradition in which women do not inherit, in which women do not lead, and in which women do not talk to God. It is this 'historical and moral element' that presented capitalism with a cultural heritage of forms of masculinity and femininity. It is within this 'historical and moral element' that the entire domain of sex, sexuality, and sex oppression is subsumed. And the briefness of Marx's comment [upon it] only serves to emphasize the vast area of social life that it covers and leaves unexamined. Only by subjecting this 'historical and moral element' to analysis can the structures of sex oppression be delineated."

It should be admitted by me here that Rubin's specific concerns in her essay are not exactly the same as mine but they overlap to the extent that Rubin wants to establish the cultural and social context of sex, gender and sexuality as well as more general things such as an economic system or the political valuation of people and their behaviours. This, taken together, forms the imaginary of a system of social relations that is a community or a society, something in which any imagined individual is set. All of us are products of sociality, simply put. More specifically in my context here, how sex is viewed, and what it is viewed as and for, is completely implicated in these ideas. As Rubin then explains:

"a human group must do more than apply its activity to reshaping the natural world in order to clothe, feed, and warm itself. We usually call the system by which elements of the natural world are transformed into objects of human consumption the 'economy.' But the needs that are satisfied by economic activity even in the richest, Marxian sense do not exhaust fundamental human requirements. A human group must also reproduce itself from generation to generation. The needs of sexuality and procreation must be satisfied as much as the need to eat, and one of the most obvious deductions to be made from the data of anthropology is that these needs are hardly ever satisfied in any 'natural' form, any more than are the needs for food. Hunger is hunger, but what counts as food is culturally determined and obtained. Every society has some form of organized economic activity. Sex is sex, but what counts as sex is equally culturally determined and obtained. Every society also has a sex/gender system—a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be.

The realm of human sex, gender, and procreation has been subjected to, and changed by, relentless social activity for millennia. Sex as we know it—gender identity, sexual desire and fantasy, concepts of childhood—is itself a social product. We need to understand the relations of its production"

One interesting and very anthropological way Rubin does this (she is an anthropologist, after all) is by discussing KINSHIP. I am very interested in kinship (for intellectual and personal reasons to do with my own past life) for it is basically the subject of relationships. Here is what Rubin has to say about kinship:

"To an anthropologist, a kinship system is not a list of biological relatives. It is a system of categories and statuses which often contradict actual genetic relationships. There are dozens of examples in which socially defined kinship statuses take precedence over biology. The Nuer custom of 'woman marriage' is a case in point. The Nuer define the status of fatherhood as belonging to the person in whose name cattle bridewealth is given for the mother. Thus, a woman can be married to another woman, and be husband to the wife and father of her children, despite the fact that she is not the inseminator.

In pre-state societies, kinship is often the idiom of social interaction, organizing economic, political, and ceremonial, as well as sexual activity. One's duties, responsibilities, and privileges vis-à-vis others are defined in terms of mutual kinship or lack thereof. The exchange of goods and services, production and distribution, hostility and solidarity, ritual and ceremony, all take place within the organizational structure of kinship. The ubiquity and adaptive effectiveness of kinship has led many anthropologists to consider its invention, along with the invention of language, to have been the developments that decisively marked the discontinuity between semihuman hominids and human beings."

It is important to understand here that kinship is fictive. It is an act of imagination that supplies its own values, meanings and reasons. This is ALWAYS the case because, in and through it, something is being said about human beings and not merely specific cultures. (You will recall Nietzsche's parable which I go back to again and again.) Since kinship is always fictive (which is the same as saying "since people can always decide who and what is important and how to arrange relationships in and amongst themselves"), it is not a matter of right and wrong (especially in some metaphysical sense) but of consequences. How does this kinship arrangement work? What are its results and consequences? Could

we arrange ourselves differently to better outcomes? Etc. My whole argument in this chapter, when it comes to sex and that last question, is "Yes".

Rubin tells us in her essay that kinship is very important to the anthropologist in explaining how communities and societies come to be what they are. Forms of kinship can be wildly (a not inappropriate term) different - as different as capitalist societies and ones where selling anything for profit would cause huge offence or even threaten war. In previous writing I have spoken of cultures where sex is separated from parenthood (the people who bring the child up are not those who biologically created it) and where women seek out multiple male sex partners, believing that all the sex partners contribute something to any final child produced (any child then having multiple fathers). I have discussed places where "marriage" is pretty much the same thing as moving your stuff in (and is annulled by simply moving it out again) and where sex is not something with commercial value but something that is social glue and shared freely and communally as a consequence. It is fictions of kinship which explain things like "incest taboos, cross-cousin marriage, terms of descent, relationships of avoidance or forced intimacy, clans and sections, taboos on names" and many other things besides. It is important to recognise, then, that it is our ideas of kinship which determine our concepts of desired and expected relations, sexual or economic or political. These are ideas which can be modified and changed over time for they do not have to be any one thing. This is why the world has, and has had, myriad forms of kinship and culture.

All that said, my argument in this chapter (and this book) is for a particular kind of kinship and so culture. It is neither capitalist nor patriarchal. It is one more about giving gifts than being able (or even desiring) to sell or purchase anything. And its absolutely nothing to do with financial gain, profit, surplus value, property or making a resource artificially scarce

so that you can control its price. Anthropologically speaking (as Rubin discusses it in her essay), it is more to do with Lévi-Strauss and Marcel Mauss and their talk about "gift exchanges" as a societal means of economy than it is to do with capitalism. Rubin tells us, after Mauss, that gift economies "confer... upon [their] participants a special relationship of trust, solidarity and mutual aid." That's what I am going for here in terms of kinship. Gift economies, understood this way, establish a relationship between people through the perpetual exchanging of gifts. As Rubin then quotes Mauss directly: "The gift is the primitive way of achieving the peace that in civil society is secured by the state. . . . Composing society, the gift was the liberation of culture." Rubin later tells us in her essay that "A kinship system is an imposition of social ends upon a part of the natural world" so such things are never inconsequential. It is then a matter of taking responsibility to ask what the consequences of our kinship systems are and what they lead to or produce - and to acting accordingly once that analysis has been performed and concluded. For example, Rubin writes that:

"Kinship systems do not merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage names and ancestors, rights, and people—men, women, and children—in concrete systems of social relationships. These relationships always include certain rights for men, others for women."

If you are in a situation where a woman, or sex, can be bought or sold then that is an aspect, and a fact, of the kinship system in which you are living. And it is something you may want to analyse. Or even change.

Kinship has much to do with sex and how it is utilised and thought about. Rubin says that "Kinship is the culturalisation of biological sexuality on the societal level." She gives an anthropological example:

"Kinship terminology contains information about the system. Kin terms demarcate statuses and indicate some of the attributes of those statuses. For instance, in the Trobriand Islands a man calls the women of his clan by the term for 'sister.' He calls women of clans into which he can marry by a term indicating their marriageability. When the young Trobriand male learns these terms, he learns which women he can safely desire. In Lacan's scheme, the Oedipal crisis occurs when a child learns of the sexual rules embedded in the terms for family and relatives. The crisis begins when the child comprehends the system and his or her place in it; the crisis is resolved when the child accepts that place and accedes to it. Even if the child refuses that place, he or she cannot escape the knowledge of it."

Compare this to the many tawdry and badly acted videos in which people pretend to fuck their fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers - or the disingenuous term "step" is added as if the viewer is so easily fooled or appeased. These are role plays, we are told, but what they actually are is plays on our notions of appropriate kinship relations and the creation of the apparent thrill of the taboo (which, of course, is completely dispelled by the fact of using named actors who may themselves be porn-famous people. We know they are not really related and actually established porn companies would never produce a video in which *actual* incestuous relations were depicted for fear of societal and legal censure). This is then taboo pretended for profit, the commercialisation of taboo, the hypocrisy of sex for dollars that is nothing to do with any genuine kinship at all except in commercial and patriarchal terms. What is instantiated and reproduced here is then a static patriarchal/capitalist kinship model which is, ironically, reinforced in, by and through

pretending to transgress it. An actually radical person in an actually radical kinship situation, someone out to change the world, would genuinely and consensually fuck their father, mother, sister, brother, and do it for the consequent benefits of doing it. And without shame.

Rubin writes her essay in the cause of "feminism" - and it is a particularly queer feminism for Rubin is one of the originators of queer theory and queer thinking. Scholars such as Judith Butler were greatly influenced in their own ideas by essays such as this one of Rubin's I comment on here. It should be no surprise, then, that what she calls for as a result of her investigations is "a revolution in kinship" and that is also what I see as needful in regard to sex in our society as well. Thus:

"The organization of sex and gender once had functions other than itself—it organized society. Now, it mainly organizes and reproduces itself. The kinds of relationships sexuality established in the dim human past still dominate our sexual lives, our ideas about men and women, and the ways we raise our children. But they lack the functional load they once carried. One of the most conspicuous features of kinship is that it has been systematically stripped of its functions—political, economic, educational, and organizational. It has been reduced to its barest bones—sex and gender.

Human sexual life will always be subject to convention and human intervention. It will never be completely 'natural,' if only because our species is social, cultural, and articulate. The wild profusion of infantile sexuality will always be tamed. The confrontation between immature and helpless infants and the developed social life of their elders will probably always leave some residue of disturbance. But the mechanisms and aims of this process need not be largely independent of conscious choice. Cultural evolution provides us with the

opportunity to seize control of the means of sexuality, reproduction, and socialization, and to make conscious decisions to liberate human sexual life from the archaic relationships which deform it. Ultimately, a thoroughgoing feminist revolution would liberate more than women. It would liberate forms of sexual expression, and it would liberate human personality from the straightjacket of gender."

All desirable aims in my book - and things which lead Rubin to pronounce that "The sex/gender system must be reorganised through political action." Here an important point is made by Rubin which I would extrapolate in my own terms:

"we are not only oppressed as women; we are oppressed by having to be women—or men as the case may be. I personally feel that the feminist movement must dream of even more than the elimination of the oppression of women. It must dream of the elimination of obligatory sexualities and sex roles. The dream I find most compelling is one of an androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love."

Such a vision disintegrates the categories by which capitalism and patriarchy currently seek to exploit sex for profit. I would go further than Rubin. I imagine an androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society in which love, sex and the desire for intimacy are things no one could ever imagine to leverage for financial gain, a society in which these things were the glue which held people together in community as they, with complete mutuality, attended to each others' needs and desires (and so to their community's needs and desires) as a public common good. What Rubin's essay shows, and then requires political action as a response to, is that this doesn't just happen all by itself. "Sex/gender systems... are products of historical human activity" - as Rubin puts this.

That's why political action is necessary. That's why I think love and sex ARE POLITICAL ACTION. As Rubin later adds, "Kinship and marriage are always parts of total social systems and are tied into economic and political arrangements." That being so, it is these "arrangements" - whole and entire - that our political action must seek to affect and change. So: LOVE and SEX are POLITICAL ACTION. Engage in political action today!

Someone who certainly did (although not the kind I am suggesting) was the radical anti-porn feminist, Andrea Dworkin. She was also a participant in the "sex wars" of the 1970s and 1980s – but not on the same side as Gayle Rubin. When you read Dworkin, and particularly the further you go along her timeline, the more you find out why. But this is something itself at least worthy of some reflection because, at least at the beginning of Dworkin's writing career with her 1974 book *Woman Hating*, I don't think that she and the Gayle Rubin of "The Traffic in Women" wanted things that were really that different. They did certainly go about it in completely different (and, indeed, opposed) ways, however. The story of, and reasoning for, Dworkin's 1980s political and civil campaign against porn is told in her book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. This is a book that was originally written in the late 1970s and published in 1979 only after 10 publishers flat refused to publish it and another 2 initially agreed but then backed out. It was reissued in 1991 (the version I will be referring to) after a decade in which Dworkin (along with Catherine MacKinnon) tried to get a civil law implemented which would make pornographers liable financially for the evidenced consequences of their pornography. This activity was predicated on the public testimony of multiple women who bravely gave their life stories to public bodies which told of years of torture, rape and humiliation by men who took porn (whether legal or illegal) as a guidebook and as something to live by and to recreate in real lives and relationships.

One thing many people forget about porn, in fact, is that IT IS NOT REAL LIFE. (If you prefer, we may say PORN IS NOT NORMATIVE.) Porn, simply in the act of being recorded, as well as in the act of being watched back as a product alongside other, similar product, is always artificial and staged. Much of it (although I would never claim all) is produced on the same basis as any other capitalist work in that people are hired by a company to perform certain acts and/or scenarios for money (an arrangement I have already argued is not benign in its relationships in itself). Others produce their own porn (a development which almost entirely exploded into reality after Dworkin had died and so which she never lived to see) and so are self-employed (in an economy where money is both demanded and required). Sometimes the porn is itself coerced. Which, eventually, is where so-called snuff movies come from.

The first thing that sticks out to me from Dworkin's reissued edition of *Pornography* is a quote from the feminist Victoria Woodhull, the first American woman to ever run for President (in 1872 when women didn't even have the vote). She writes in "Tried As By Fire; or, The True and The False, Socially" that:

"Sexual freedom, then, means the abolition of prostitution both in and out of marriage; means the emancipation of woman from sexual slavery and her coming into ownership and control of her own body; means the end of her pecuniary dependence upon man, so that she may never even seemingly have to procure whatever she may desire or need by sexual favors."

Given the positioning of this text before even Dworkin's contents page, one may imagine it as somewhat thematic and summarising of the whole. What follows immediately after the contents page in the 1991 edition is a new introduction to the text which,

consequently, is the only part of this edition of the book able to comment directly on Dworkin's 1980s political activities. Of course, as the book is now composed, this forms a new context for the whole. All Dworkin's later ideas and theories are now contextualised by her political action and her given reasons for that which the text itself is seen to be motivating of. This introduction starts with a first part about the black American runaway slave, abolitionist and social reformer, Frederick Douglass, and she uses him as the example of a "serious man" who took the misery of slaves seriously enough to act in their defence and emancipation. One here gets the obvious idea that Dworkin sees herself in a similar role in relation to women where the enemy is not slavery, simply put, but pornography as a form of sex slavery, specifically put. She asks her reader to:

"Suppose there were a politics of liberation premised on that assertion—an assertion not of ideology but of deep and stubborn outrage at being misused, a resolute assertion, a serious assertion by serious women."

Here Dworkin sets out her stall not as one who is predominantly "ideological" but as one who is predominantly angry. Her main weapon is not theoretical ideas but personal testimony. It is a story of women prostituted, raped, beaten, used, abused, humiliated, imprisoned for fighting back, and regarded as items of sexual free use regardless of consent, women who should be subject to coercion and exploitation of their sex. ("Consent... or else" is not consent.) She is talking about women involuntarily enrolled in a sexual servitude and they are not necessarily even prostitutes or porn performers (not that that would matter). They can be just mothers, wives, girlfriends, sisters, cousins, schoolgirls, neighbours, work colleagues, friends or acquaintances. Basically anyone the perpetrator finds who, from his perspective, has three usable holes and some chest bumps. Dworkin's method here is basically to just let women tell their stories of how this

has happened to them – and what they have experienced as a result. And its harrowing to read. But not nearly as harrowing as living it every day for years as some of those quoted did (and others in similar situations no doubt still do). Not every woman in the world is a sexual slave. But that does not mean no women in the world are sexual slaves. It does not mean we should do nothing about the ones who are. It does not mean we should do nothing about the children who are (and some of Dworkin's examples were children).

This is a story of women trapped in relationships with men obsessed with pornography who want to act it out and need a willing victim through which to live out every violent fantasy they have seen depicted on a screen. It doesn't really matter whether the women want to do it or not but its going to cause problems (for them) if they don't. Because the men in these scenarios, with whom they are in some sort of relationship, are not taking "no" for an answer. (There are also many videos, I recall one ugly example I once stumbled upon in particular featuring the American porn actor James Deen, where they won't take no for an answer either. If you go through the videos on free porn sites you will find that "coercion" is a very popular theme in all sorts of ways. The "excuse" for these videos is that they are "only" fantasies. But what kind of person dreams of actual rape or physical and mental sexual coercion so much that they want to recreate it for real?) Here sex becomes (and requires) violence. This is not the consensual, discussed and negotiated physical interaction necessary to BDSM (which is probably the most ethical form of sexuality there is simply because the apparent recipient of the violence is actually the one driving what goes on – and what is wanted and desired is negotiated beforehand with the aim of *working together* to achieve it). This is the actually coercive, exploitative and utterly controlling violence that is simply violence rather than sex game. (If you are really playing a game then you would expect that everyone is equally enthusiastic and in on that fact.) This is sexualised violence, sexualised violence for entertainment, violence with

actual, genuine, real victims. As one of Dworkin's witnesses says of her own horrific experience which was something like this: "Pornography is not a fantasy, it was my life, reality." Dworkin presents herself as a woman who takes this seriously in a way that society simply does not. She treats pornography – as a whole – as "cruel, violent, basic to the way our culture sees and treats women". She imagines the attitudes depicted in it, whether acted out, role play, fantasy or paid performance, as "real". She sees pornography as a weapon used to beat, rape and sexually assault women with. For dollars.

Women's opinions on this, Dworkin maintains, are never sought out – especially if they are the sorts of stories Dworkin wants to highlight. Complainants are sidelined and belittled, turned into weirdos who are "not normal like us" and so easily dismissed. (The first and necessary step in ignoring anyone is to dehumanise them in your terms. So dehumanised, they do not have to be taken account of.) Dworkin maintains that women are put in this situation as a class by the pornification of patriarchal capitalist society in which consequential action continues on beyond that which was filmed and watched. Women who say no to this society, who cry out as abused victims of it, are put in the column of those for which society does not have to account. Their hurt cannot be real for porn does not see any hurt. It only sees (male) satisfaction. The video ends when the ejaculate is all over the woman's face for, so this tells us, that is the end of the entertainment – when a man is spent. (Compare pretty much every video in the "MOMPOV" series.) Or maybe instead the hurt can be real. But it is then not as important as "free speech" or the right for a company to make money exploiting sexualised violence. A line has been drawn. A choice has been made. Violence won and these women (or maybe just women) don't count. They remain as "living remnants of the general struggle".

Dworkin underscores that “pornography” means something specific to these women in their own experience:

“That meaning is: pornography is the orchestrated destruction of women’s bodies and souls; rape, battery, incest, and prostitution animate it; dehumanization and sadism characterize it; it is war on women, serial assaults on dignity, identity, and human worth; it is tyranny. Each woman who has survived knows from the experience of her own life that pornography is captivity—the woman trapped in the picture used on the woman trapped wherever he’s got her.”

This links the relations of pornography’s production with the relations of its consequences in a necessary way. Pornography exists for profit reasons. It exists for capitalist reasons. And capitalism must consume its resources to extract its privatised surplus value. In this, women are used against women. Women entangled in patriarchal capitalism are used to act out fantasies which are then used against other women entangled in patriarchal capitalism in ways that the women concerned would wish were *only* fantasies. But fantasy has a nasty habit of intruding upon the material, of shaping and affecting materiality, of leaving marks, scars, wounds - or sometimes just bodies - that remain. Even courts, according to Dworkin’s account of her attempts to instantiate civil laws which wanted to make pornographers accountable, have not denied this. Judges have affirmed that pornography does indeed “promote... insult and injury, rape and assault”, that it materially affects women to their detriment. But these same courts see the paid women in the pornographic products as the property of those who employed them and so as the free speech of the capitalists who exploited their labour to begin with. Exploitation to begin with, pornography (and the patriarchal and capitalist pornographic attitude) continues its journey of exploitation, waved on by a male-led society that does

not care and that refuses to join the dots and take responsibility. Dworkin's potential law (which was ruled unconstitutional) is not even that draconian. It basically stipulated that no one be forced into porn, no one be subjected to having to watch porn, that, should anyone be subject to sexual assault as a result of porn in a demonstrable way, the pornographers were also culpable, and that no one should be made a subject of porn against their will or without their knowledge. It also proposed to make it illegal to even produce porn of the type in which women were subject to sexual violence or imagined to be enjoying it, desiring it, etc. It was basically a law which wanted to outlaw the filmed production of sexual violence against women. But even then it wasn't just concerned with women. If any of the same material used men, transsexuals or children in the same ways it also sought to outlaw that too. Put simply, it wanted to outlaw sexual violence as a permitted form of entertainment someone could produce and make money from.

I regard that as an admirable motive and I would weep no tears for those who can't make pretend rape movies any more (let alone actual rape movies). Historically, a problem arose here for some sex positive feminists (like Gayle Rubin) in that Dworkin's aim (as well as that of other anti-porn feminists) fell on BDSM (which was participated in and documented by Gayle Rubin professionally in her role as a cultural anthropologist) which they saw, incorrectly, as simply more of the same. (BDSM is fully consensual, discusses what will happen and what is desired beforehand, contains protocols for slowing down or stopping what is going on, and is fundamentally a collaboration driven by the one seemingly in the sub-dominant position. It is explicitly role play and the relations acted out or performed are are not meant to be imitative of, or inspirational to, "real life" outside of the scene in any specific way. All this is often not understood by those who just stumble upon it.) That Dworkin would want to outlaw material which depicts genuine sexual violence, however, the violence of an aggressor against an UNWILLING, or depicted

as unwilling, other, that is in, or carries on into, real life seems both decent and reasonable. It asks for a genuine equality in society and takes the “human dignity” of everyone seriously. It recognises that a commercially produced product affects real lives very much for the worse and, in that, Dworkin’s whole story plays out as JUST ANOTHER STORY OF CAPITALISM, the organisation of human relations in which people become just more resources to be used up and exploited. Capitalism is used to leaving a trail of destruction behind it for which it accepts no responsibility and, reading Dworkin, pornography comes across as just another example of more of the same. No longer now Nina Hartley’s “educational tool”, its simply the exploitation of people filmed and then used as inspiration and impetus to the sexually violent exploitation of others who have the patriarchally capitalist pornified mind (and its action) inflicted upon them. Pornography is a capitalism story and a patriarchal story. It is a story of violence. As such, a question Dworkin asks explicitly in *Pornography* is pertinent: “Why is pornography credible in our society?” This leads to Dworkin asking how women specifically are meant to survive such a phenomenon. We might equally ask how anyone is meant to survive capitalism, the relations of destruction and death.

Now, of course, this is a million miles away from “love and sex as political action” as I have described it above. Except its not, is it? But its been twisted, made ugly, depraved. This is sexual violence, rather than love, as political action – for be assured it is of political import (and motivation if what I have been saying is on point). This is domination and exploitation for real by means of sexualised violence, the violence of capitalism and patriarchy carried into the sexual arena, denuding it of any tinge of love and replacing it with the logic of violence (which is a capitalist and a patriarchal logic) and domination. The aim of this sex is specifically to dominate and to victimise, to instantiate genuine real world relations by sexual means. The degradation and humiliation and subordination is real and for a

political purpose for it cannot be coincidence, or have gone completely unnoticed, that so much porn is the male coercion of women, whether badly acted out or for real. It cannot have gone unnoticed that this actively influences others and habituates them to destructive pornographic tropes such as that coercing women, or seeing them as the sexual facilitators of men's desires, is legitimate or understandable.

One has to ask questions of a society that allows this sort of thing to go on and, indeed, constitutionally protects the rights of those who enable and inspire it to. But there, so my argument goes, we are not simply attacking pornography: we are attacking the larger formations of society, culture and politics (capitalism and patriarchy) which are the context in which it becomes possible and is allowed to thrive. Were our relations not capitalist and patriarchal relations it might be that pornography became impossible – certainly as we know it today. Dworkin insists that, when it comes to pornography, “the power is real, the cruelty is real, the sadism is real, the subordination is real”. I do not really disagree with her. Pornography, looked at from this angle of view, is an ongoing archive of violence and of the exploitation of those employed to make it and of those damaged by its after effects (which are undeniable). So the issue actually becomes, in my terms, how to destroy and dissipate these relations of violence and my answer is by turning them to relations of love.

This is not merely a mental thing (as Dworkin is very eager to explain) but a matter of actual, physical, material relations that have genuine every day effects (with which Rubin and Goldman would agree). It is about countering the effects of capitalism and patriarchy in real life. It is about taking Immortan Joe's power away so his captive wives (and everyone else) can choose their own lives. It is about having the choice to obey Norsefire or not in a land of do as you please. It is about disarming relations of violence and

replacing them with relations of love. It is about sex as something genuine, free, of agency and autonomy, participated in always voluntarily (which rules capitalism out of bounds completely), as an action of love (whether temporary or more long lasting). It is about a type of relation and the motivation and logic that relation has or serves socially and personally. Pornography, then, such as it is and against such a background, is largely the advertising pitch for heterosexual capitalist patriarchy. As Dworkin says of it:

"Pornography incarnates male supremacy. It is the DNA of male dominance. Every rule of sexual abuse, every nuance of sexual sadism, every highway and byway of sexual exploitation, is encoded in it. It's what men want us to be, think we are, make us into; how men use us; not because biologically they are men but because this is how their social power is organized. From the perspective of the political activist, pornography is the blueprint of male supremacy; it shows how male supremacy is built. The political activist needs to know the blueprint. In cultural terms, pornography is the fundamentalism of male dominance. Its absolutism on women and sexuality, its dogma, is merciless. Women are consigned to rape and prostitution; heretics are disappeared and destroyed. Pornography is the essential sexuality of male power: of hate, of ownership, of hierarchy; of sadism, of dominance. The premises of pornography are controlling in every rape and every rape case, whenever a woman is battered or prostituted, in incest, including in incest that occurs before a child can even speak, and in murder—murders of women by husbands, lovers, and serial killers."

Pornography: Men Possessing Women was not Andrea Dworkin's first book, however. Previously she had written one called *Woman Hating* which covered its title subject in fairy tales, in pornographic depiction (In words not simply images) and in "herstory" (a feminised history, in this case of Chinese foot binding and of witches). But then, quite surprisingly to me, there is a fourth and final part to this book which all the rest has led up

to: androgyny. (Here Rubin has a similar interest too.) Like, I suspect, many people, I know of Andrea Dworkin as the journalistically-projected, man-hating, anti-porn, outrage machine. So to find that her first book discussed androgyny with some favour was somewhat revelatory to me. (I suspect it might be somewhat of an embarrassment to some of her later “supporters” or wannabe imitators too since they go in on Dworkin’s various causes with much less nuance and detail than she did.) Let’s see what Dworkin has to say as I move towards the conclusion of my theme in this chapter.

It is clear that what Andrea Dworkin wanted in, by and through discussing androgyny was “to break the form” – the form, that is, of sex and gender (thought of relationally) as it had come to be. This is a similar aim to both Goldman and Rubin and was the problematic of Dworkin’s entire rhetorical career. Her conviction was that the form, patriarchy, male dominance, heterosexism, the logic of violence, as it was and still is, caused active harm and did real lasting damage. Such damage might even have been the point of it. Any hegemony must have victims. At the head of her androgyny section she has a quote from Julian Beck which talks about “the journey to love”. I find that encouraging. The quote is about escaping a torment we are forced to endure and so the path to something better (love). This, of course, suggests that the relations we find ourselves in now are not love and I concur with that evaluation entirely. Dworkin says, first of all, that she “wants to destroy sexism” but she defines “sexism” in a very contemporary way (*Woman Hating* is 51 years old at time of writing) when she describes sexism as “polar role definitions of male and female, man and woman.” She goes on to see the institutions of this sexism as “patriarchal power”, “the family” and “the nation-state” in a way very amenable to anarchist interpretation and agreement. (Dworkin, at the beginning of the book, writes that it is “in memory of Emma Goldman”.) Dworkin is then attracted to “androgynous mythology” seemingly because it “provides us with a model which does not use polar role

definitions, where the definitions are not, implicitly or explicitly, male = good, female = bad, man = human, woman = other." She emphasises that androgynous myths are "multisexual" and so go beyond notions of bisexuality (which is still "polar" thinking) and she talks, very encouragingly (and in a way her modern anti-trans supporters never could), of "building community" and "the fullest expression of human sexual possibility and creativity." (It should be noted by readers here that some modern supporters of Dworkin's past views wish to enlist her in their anti-trans agendas even though she never really, when alive, had much to say about this. Her former life partner, John Stoltenberg, a trans supporter, has stated that Dworkin was herself not anti-trans and this has led to the predictable disputes and recriminations as a result as people try to breathe life into their retrospective, and disputable, images of Dworkin. For myself, I will let her printed words speak for her and you can make up your own mind.)

Dworkin continues:

"Androgyny as a concept has no notion of sexual repression built into it. Where woman is carnality, and carnality is evil, it stands to reason (hail reason!) that woman must be chained, whipped, punished, purged; that fucking is shameful, forbidden, fearful, guilt-ridden. Androgyny as the basis of sexual identity and community life provides no such imperatives. Sexual freedom and freedom for biological women, or all persons 'female,' are not separable. That they are different, and that sexual freedom has priority, is the worst of sexist hypes. Androgyny can show the way to both. It may be the one road to freedom open to women, men, and that emerging majority, the rest of us."

As such, androgyny for Andrea Dworkin seems to be about imagining a way to equitable relationships and that is a laudable desire. It is something compatible with what I am

regarding in this chapter as an agenda of love as opposed to an agenda of violence. Dworkin is explicit that this is a matter of “finding the right model” but, of course, “right models” are dependent upon purposes. Here Dworkin entangles every person alive in the consequences of the cultures they find themselves in. These are described as “programming” and we are told that they operate “on every level of choice and action”. She gives a description of the culture we are programmed by and that is operative within us as a consequence:

“The notion of man as a part of the natural world, integrated into it, in form as distinct (no more so) as the tarantula, in function as important (no more so) as the honey bee or tree, is in eclipse, and that eclipse extends not over a decade, or over a century, but over the whole of written history. The arrogance which informs man’s relation with nature (simply, he is superior to it) is precisely the same arrogance which informs his relationship with woman (simply, he is superior to her). Here we see the full equation: woman = carnality = nature. The separation of man from nature, man placing himself over and above it, is directly responsible for the current ecological situation which may lead to the extinction of many forms of life, including human life. Man has treated nature much as he has treated woman: with rape, plunder, violence. The phenomenological world is characterized by its diversity, the complexity and mutuality of its interactions, and man’s only chance for survival in that world consists of finding the proper relationship to it.”

This commentary equates woman with nature in a way later ecofeminists would identify with – particularly in relation to male violence done towards both (in a way Immortan Joe perfectly fictionalises when he sees both women and nature as things to be possessed and farmed. Immortan Joe may be fictional but you best believe he is absolutely George Miller’s commentary on the modern world). Dworkin’s rhetoric continues:

"We must find ways of destroying the cultural personae imposed on our psyches and we must discover forms of relationship, behavior, sexual being and interaction, which are compatible with our inherent natural possibilities. We must move away from the perverse, two-dimensional definitions which stem from sexual repression, which are the source of social oppression, and move toward creative, full, multidimensional modes of sexual expression. Essentially the argument is this: we look at the world we inhabit and we see disaster everywhere; police states; prisons and mental hospitals filled to overflowing; alienation of workers from their work, women and men from each other, children from the adult community, governments contemptuous of their people, people filled with intense self-hatred; street violence, assault, rape, contract murderers, psychotic killers; acquisition gone mad, concentrated power and wealth; hunger, want, starvation, camps filled with refugees. Those phenomena mark the distance between civilized man and natural man, tribal man, whose sexual and social patterns functioned in a more integrated, balanced way. We know how it is now, and we want to know how it was then. While we cannot reconstruct the moment when humans emerged in evolution into recognizable humanness, or analyze that person to see what existence was like, while we cannot seek to emulate rituals and social forms of tribal people, or penetrate to and then imitate the dynamic relationship primitive people had with the rest of the natural world, while we cannot even know much of what happened before people made pottery and built cities, while we cannot (and perhaps would not) obliterate the knowledge that we do have (of space travel and polio vaccines, cement and Hiroshima), we can still find extant in the culture echoes of a distant time when people were more together, figuratively and literally. These echoes reflect a period in human development when people functioned as a part of the natural world, not set over against it; when men and women, male and female, were whatever they were, not polar opposites, separated by dress and role into castes, fragmented pieces of some not-to-be-imagined whole."

I hope you recognise Dworkin's apparent yearning here for I have talked about it before and, before this book is done, I will talk about it again. It is a yearning to be OUT OF THIS PRISON, this cultural prison which suffocates and tortures and kills and is DEFINED BY VIOLENCE. It is a yearning to be free of societal categories and classifications, to escape a controlling biopolitics as Michel Foucault diagnosed it. It is the will not to be the grist for someone else's mill, not to be the fuel for their fire, a mere resource used up to profit either someone else or, worse, just an impersonal and exploitative system. It says that men and women are neither natural kinds nor binary opposites and that conflict is not the automatic and indisputable mode of relationship. It argues that to proceed by doing habitual violence to designated "others" is stupid and self-defeating, a logic of those already besotted with violence. It takes as foundation myth stories such as that of the biblical first human being in Genesis 1 who was created as a human, male and female (essentially all possible human materiality) in one singular form: the androgyne. (We shall meet this figure again in the third and final section of my book.) Myths like this (and in *Woman Hating* Dworkin outlines several others on a global cultural scale) completely reset the field of human relations. Which is why all cultures, their values and politics, are not simply the same. We have a choice even while individual cultures may want to control. Dworkin explains the situation in her own words like this at the beginning of her final chapter titled "Androgyny, Fucking, and Community":

"The discovery is, of course, that 'man and woman' are fictions, caricatures, cultural constructs. As models they are reductive, totalitarian, inappropriate to human becoming. As roles they are static, demeaning to the female, dead-ended for male and female both. Culture as we know it legislates those fictive roles as normalcy. Deviations from sanctioned, sacred behavior are 'gender disorders,' 'criminality,' as well as 'sick,' 'disgusting,' and 'immoral.' Heterosexuality, which is properly defined as the ritualized behavior built on

polar role definition, and the social institutions related to it (marriage, the family, the Church, ad infinitum) are 'human nature.' Homosexuality, transsexuality, incest, and bestiality persist as the 'perversions' of this 'human nature' we presume to know so much about."

Dworkin then states that the idea "that there are two polar distinct sexes" is "fiction". And a dangerously destructive fiction at that. She even goes so far, in what actually forms a list of scientific observations which, at a minimum, complicate the notion of binary sex, as to speculate on a prehistoric and very material androgyny and hermaphroditism in a human or pre-human ancestor. This is based on the fact that the existence of such beings is consistent in the mythological record cross-culturally. Her ultimate argument here is that, essentially, "male" and "female", "man" and "woman" are just words – and words which attempt to describe various observations. Having other observations, or observing differently, you would have, and invent, other words based on other observations. And there would be nothing wrong if you did. Since Dworkin wrote this, of course, several people have observed differently and come up with other words. Those of patriarchal bent (which includes some self-imagined modern day radical feminists who consider themselves Dworkin fans) have not taken to this nearly as kindly as we might imagine the Dworkin writing here would have. Dworkin, in fact, concludes (after making 14 separate points to counter the notion of a twin pole human sexuality) that:

"We are, clearly, a multi-sexed species which has its sexuality spread along a vast fluid continuum where the elements called male and female are not discrete."

Dworkin sees this "multisexuality" (which, for her, has sources in human biology and androgynous mythology) as having "concrete implications". She says that "By redefining

human sexuality, or by defining it correctly, we can transform human relationship and the institutions which seek to control that relationship.” This, of course, is all to the good. It is transformative of both sex and sexuality. It is a narrative of love and acceptance rather than violence and conflict. It is multiplicitous and diverse and so not prone to the “them and us” of a binary imaginary. Androgyny, another name for simple humanity, makes us all versions of the same thing (which, I suggest, at a basic level we simply are). Dworkin, in so many words, explicitly includes trans people (then called “transsexuals”) in this multisexual and androgynous understanding of humanity. She says that every trans person “has the right to survival on his/her own terms,” something which includes the right to gender-affirming surgery. She says changing our understanding of sex and sexuality as she suggests will transform the position of trans people in society for the better so that they may be “no longer persecuted and despised”. She also says that an acceptance of our androgynous reality will also end the very idea of the trans person – because it will end the idea of “man” and “woman” as well. All that will remain is fluid androgyny and the “new modes of sexual identity and behavior” that they inculcate.

Dworkin’s sexology is more mature than some I have seen (not least amongst several of those who claim her as a campaigning forebear). She speaks of “natural androgynous eroticism” as the wellspring of all “cooperative human community” in a context in which (as Goldman and Freud) she imagines “all human relationships are primarily erotic”. She uses the phrase “erotic civil disobedience” of transvestism which is an idea that has wider applications (besides perfectly encapsulating the feeling I felt as a teenage youth who dressed as a girl when coming down to dinner on a school trip to the ire of his teacherly overseers). She locates the gatekeeping institution of binary sex (and so heterosexuality and patriarchy) as the nuclear family – which means it must be destroyed. (“The nuclear family is the school of values in a sexist, sexually repressed society.”) She puts forward the

tribe as that communal relation which would “destroy particularized roles and fixed erotic identity”. Foreseeing the future uselessness of women to men in capitalist patriarchal society once scientists in laboratories have figured out how to replace them with birthing machines and sexbots, she imagines that women must either seize control or “we must accomplish the transformation into androgyny”. She adds:

“if we can create androgynous community, we can abandon power altogether as a social reality —that is the final, and most important, implication of androgyny... The object is cultural transformation. The object is the development of a new kind of human being and a new kind of human community. All of us who have ever tried to right a wrong recognize that truly nothing short of everything will really do.... We must instead build communities where violence is not the main dynamic of human relationship, where natural desire is the fundament of community, where androgyny is the operative premise, where tribe based on androgyny and the social forms which would develop from it are the bases of the collective cultural structure —noncoercive, nonsexist. ”

And I don't really disagree with any of that (for it is my thesis) – albeit I did not expect to find out that it was Andrea Dworkin who had said it well before me. In my own terms, it is the difference between the politics of love and the politics of violence, the politics of care and the politics of conflict, the politics where sex is a matter of not just personal but also social love and the politics where sex is an instrument of personal and social domination. Pornography, to return to my former theme and one Dworkin discussed *ad nauseam*, is, much more often than not, part of the violence paradigm – not least as a capitalist industry controlled by a patriarchal and heterosexist mindset. Porn almost constantly besmirches, trashes, the reputation of sex as love and, in doing so, it proselytises for real world inequality and domination. Porn then becomes the PR of the will to exploit, active

violence against women and all imagined as sub-dominant others. But don't just take my word for it. Do your own research. In video after video it will just be there right in front of you waiting for you to realise it. How many "I fucked my sleeping step-sister" and "secretary fucks boss to keep her job" videos do you need to watch before it dawns on you? How many women do you need to see being filmed as they are groped on the bus or the train? How many women do you need to hear giving their testimony in regard to what porn addicts made, or tried to make, them do? The truth is this world contains REAL Immortan Joes. It will take all the sexual and erotic love in the world to protect ourselves, and our loved ones, from them. For their sex is violence and our sex is love.

(E). Pirates: Violence, Love and *Joie de Vivre* in Watery Wastelands

Writing about pirates of the Golden Age (approximately 1690-1725), one of the foremost scholars of piracy, Marcus Rediker, writes in his book *Villains of All Nations*:

"The sailor who embraced the Jolly Roger after 1716 came from a potent experience of life and labor in a wooden world. The sailor's workplace, the deep-sea sailing ship, was something of a factory in those days, a place where 'hands'—those who owned no property and who therefore sold their labor for a money wage—cooperated to make the machine go. Sailing these small, brittle wooden vessels over the forbidding oceans of the globe, the seaman took part in a profoundly collective work experience, one that required carefully synchronized cooperation with other maritime workers for the sake of survival. Facing a ship captain of almost unlimited disciplinary power and an ever readiness to use the cat-o'-nine-tails, the sailor developed an array of resistances against such concentrated authority that featured desertion, work stoppages, mutinies, and strikes. Indeed, the sailor would invent the strike during a wage dispute in London in 1768 when he and his mates went from

ship to ship, striking—lowering—the sails in an effort to make merchants grant their demands. Facing such natural and man-made dangers, which included a chronic scarcity of food and drink and a galling system of hierarchy and privilege, the sailor learned the importance of equality: his painfully acquired experience told him that a fair distribution of risks would improve everyone's chances for survival. Separated from loved ones and the rest of society for extended periods, the sailor developed a distinctive work culture with its own language, songs, rituals, and sense of brotherhood. Its core values were collectivism, anti-authoritarianism, and egalitarianism, all of which were summarized in the sentence frequently uttered by rebellious sailors: 'they were one & all resolved to stand by one another.' All of these cultural traits flowed from the work experience, and all would influence both the decision to turn pirate and how pirates would conduct themselves thereafter..."

I have written about pirates before in my book *Black Flag* which, perhaps controversially for some, took pirates as an example of anarchy in practice. In my mind there was not anything particularly utopian about this (not believing anarchy to be a utopian thing, in practice, itself) nor was there any need for it to be. I simply asked myself the question "What would anarchy really look like if it happened in the real world?" and "pirates" came up as a realistic answer. Unfortunately for all the people who sit chatting with (or pontificating to) their chosen "progressive" audience, "anarchy" is never going to be perfectly realised or appear in some pure and universal form because... its already happening and you are living in it. What you see around you is what we are making of the situation of the real anarchy (i.e. the Wasteland) that is simple existence as we know it. Anarchy, I have become convinced, is not a state of affairs people deliberately make, a forced political structure of the world, and, in fact, it continually escapes ever being so made. It then exists only in the direct action of living for yourselves and determining not

to be controlled or constrained by others in any non-voluntary or non-cooperative way. Anarchy is not “politics”; its anti-politics.

So why pick out pirates? Because, as Stephen Snelders writes in his book, which we shall be following for a while, *The Devil's Anarchy*, the “most fundamental” characteristic of pirates, broadly described, was “their defiance and refusal to accommodate to the social and political relationships of hierarchical society.” The description “pirates” here includes not only the true, acting for themselves, pirates of the aforementioned “Golden Age” but also their Atlantic precursors sometimes called buccaneers, freebooters or privateers as well. These were more properly “state-licenced pirates” in that they acted for countries or colonial powers as freelancers; they weren’t (although some would later become) true pirates. By “pirates” I mean a body of men (and it was almost uniformly just men) who formed their own crews, acted according to their own articles of association and wills, and lived *for themselves* as outcasts from, and rebels against, wider society. This is important because, as Peter Lamborn Wilson highlights in the case of Vietnamese boat people slaughtered by local Thai “pirates” in the early 1980s, whether you are actually “a pirate” or not is an ethically articulated thing. (Hence Wilson later calls these Thai aggressors “Sea-going muggers who prey on the poor, and murder them as well”.) A pirate is not just “anyone in a boat who goes out stealing and killing”. At least, as part of my anarchist discussion its not. Just as some Marxist historians have refused to call pirates “social bandits” because they only acted for themselves rather than the wider population, so, here, “pirate”, as I use the term, means something in particular. Let’s explore together what that is.

The pirates I will mainly focus on were those of the Golden Age who sailed the North, and occasionally the South, Atlantic and who had “lairs” on the borders of this vast, watery

expanse. There were other pirates at this time – notably in the Madagascar where it was mooted a pirate Utopia called “Libertalia” actually existed – but they shall remain mostly beyond our scope here. We are then talking about figures like Calico Jack, Blackbeard, Black Bart (Bartholomew) Roberts and the like. These pirates, their comrades in other ships and their various crews, almost certainly never topped 5,000 men in total during the whole of the Golden Age. Most were former seamen who had escaped the clutches of their former employers in one way or another. It is posited by Snelders (and also by Rediker) that these men as a whole formed a loose but genuine brotherhood and tradition based on past common experiences and responses to it which led them to take up arms (literally) together in their own cause. We may think of them usefully, in the context of this part of my book, as wanderers in a watery wasteland who are attempting to “brave its cruelties” on their own terms.

Already the claim has been made above that pirates of this vintage refused hierarchy. Rediker talks about their qualities as being collectivism, anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism. Yet the title of Snelders’ book I am going to follow for a while now is *The Devil’s Anarchy*. How come? Let us begin with symbols. It is in this time period when pirates began to fly the flag that would become known as “the Jolly Roger”. There is no canonical and indisputable history of its invention and so original meaning. Neither, in fact, is there a standard version of the flag which, although being black in common, could have a differing array of symbols upon it. That it had symbols upon it, of course, speaks to them having some meaning and so being intended to communicate something to those who saw it gaining upon them or coming over the horizon. Consequently, Marcus Rediker writes in his book *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*:

"The most common symbol was the human skull, or 'death's head;' sometimes isolated but more frequently the most prominent feature of an entire skeleton. Other recurring items were a weapon – cutlass, sword, or dart - and an hour glass. The flag was intended to terrify the pirates' prey, but its triad of interlocking symbols - death, violence, limited time - simultaneously pointed to meaningful parts of the seaman's experience and eloquently bespoke the pirates' own consciousness of themselves as preyed upon in turn . . . as pirates - and some believed, only as pirates - these men were able to fight back beneath the somber colours of 'King Death' against those . . . who waved banners of authority."

But that this flag, whatever its individual depiction of symbols of death, violence and limited time, was called *The Jolly Roger* is also significant. The most convincing reason for this, in my view, is the theory that it plays on a historical nickname for the Devil current at that time – "Old Roger". That a flag *named after the Devil* should become the predominant pirate flag tells us things about pirate mentality. I accept Rediker's assertion that the flag was meant to terrify those who saw it absolutely. But that it was a flag named after the Devil, in a time of Christian orthodoxy, was equally supposed to as well. This was an act of rebellion against Christianised public society much as Peter Lamborn Wilson has suggested (see his *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs and European Renegades*) that some European pirates in North Africa converted to Islam. Thus, as Snelders puts it:

"The Old, or Jolly, Roger points us to older, almost atavistic strains in our Christian culture. The flag invokes a world not unlike that of Paradise Lost, where Satan leads a rebellion against Christian hierarchy. Ranters' Bay (in Madagascar) as the location for a pirate settlement? Milton puts the Ranter phrase, 'Heaven and Hell are only states of mind;' in the mouth of Satan himself, and there were likely some Ranters among Morgan's buccaneers. Furthermore, the Admiral had a witch as adviser - witches being, as everybody knew, in

close communion with the Devil. (The infamous witch hunts in Salem took place in 1692)... Sailing for Old Roger was effectively choosing for the Devil against God, a symbolic break with hierarchical society... Unconsciously it was a turn to an older, pre-Christian religion, the religion of nomads and hunters."

The brotherhood of the Jolly Roger was, consequently, one consciously against the polity of the day, the polity on which the pirates had been brought up in Christianised European colonial nation states in the case of the vast majority. This polity seems, most importantly, to have been symbolised in and through an overarching authoritarian violence which was uniquely prevalent in the closed environment of the ship at sea. (Well it wasn't closed exactly. You could always jump overboard.) Marcus Rediker devotes an entire chapter of *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* to exactly this subject to demonstrate how, even from the cases which came to judgment and have some surviving documentation, life at sea for a simple crewman was nothing short of violently brutal with harsh physical punishments a regularised occurrence. Rediker likens it to a sea-borne factory before actual factories even really existed:

"any worker who came from a workshop, a farm, or an estate to the ship entered not only one of the great technological wonders of the day but a new set of productive relations as well. The seaman was confined within a spatially limited laboring environment, forced to cultivate regular habits and keep regular hours, and placed in cooperative relationships with both other workers and the supervisors of his labor. In all of these ways, the seaman's experience foreshadowed that of the factory worker during the Industrial Revolution."

Rediker goes on to describe the context of this as "disciplinary paternalism" and often a merchant or military ship's captain was little short of a tyrant. According to the law of the

time, the captain was like a parent to children or a master to an apprentice with “absolute authority” over all aboard his vessel. This authority was fundamentally backed up by the legal and social system of relations such that commentators of the time could call the captain “a King at Sea”. Consequently, captains issued orders and everyone else followed them. Or else. The array of punishments, beatings and altercations Rediker sets out in chapter five of *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* is eye-watering to say the least and the fact is men died for displeasing their captain or questioning his orders whilst others were merely permanently disabled or tortured. Thus one remark of the time which Rediker notes:

“There is no justice or injustice on board ship, my lad. There are only two things: duty and mutiny—mind that. All that you are ordered to do is duty. All that you refuse to do is mutiny.”

The ship, Rediker thus points out, was an absolutely “totalitarian environment” that ran on the basis of institutionalised violence in which people lost limbs, eyes, ears and lives as a result of actual or perceived disobedience or inability to perform duties adequately. Rediker makes the point, in fact, that physical intimidation was a regular tactic used by those in authority on the ship to “motivate” the crew to the performance of their already difficult duties on an ocean in what could sometimes be almost intolerable weather. “Calculated viciousness,” says Rediker, “was often a foundation of authority (as part of) a larger economy of discipline.” He even suggests murder “was clearly part of the social relations of work at sea” and this is not surprising when accountability under such conditions would have been hard to prosecute. Literally anyone could simply disappear overboard and no one would ever find out why. Any cover story could be cooked up with little chance of serious investigation. Consequently, as Rediker tells the story in his

extraordinary chapter, there developed a “them and us” mentality between those with authority and those without. The former used violence and aggression (understood as discipline) against men they perceived as lazy and feckless whilst the crew regarded the officers as cruel overseers who made full use of the power society had given them. Clearly there seems to be something of class in this as well. As a result:

“The physical environment of the ship, providing an almost infinite assortment of tools and work-related items that could be used as weapons, was the essential context for the negotiation of authority. Resort to handspikes, boards, hogshead staves, sticks, ropes, cables, marking irons, braces, hooks, adzes, axes, tar brushes, broomsticks, pitch mops, oars, harpoons, cutlasses, knives, or pistols made the possibility and reality of armed struggle ever-present.”

What this created, so Rediker informs us, was a need for defences organised by the men below decks in order to protect themselves from even the normal and regularised usage of violence as a consequence of authority. It is in this connection he talks of the crew of merchant and naval ships as those who developed feelings for collectivism, anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism. But we can also look backwards at this from the angle of the pirates, most often men who had originally gone to sea as crew aboard merchant or naval ships, within this system of authority by violence, and had to survive it. Snelders, in his chapter on “the politics of piracy”, tells us that:

“the first principle of the politics of piracy under the Jolly Roger (was) the refusal to accept non-functional authority. In general, pirate captains only had a recognized authority when their crew were fighting and chasing prey, apart from whatever influence they could (or could not) exert on the decision-making process by the strength of their personalities (and

their skilled weapons play). The importance of their influence was not automatically guaranteed, as was the case for ship's captains in normal, hierarchical society. The same view held for the pirates of the Golden Age - one did not become a pirate, with all its attendant risks, to exchange one lord for another."

Pirates, then, first and foremost, were those who had made the decision to dispense with bosses permanently. Pirate captains were functional figures chosen by the ship's company because, one hoped, they were actually good at the job of organising sailing – especially when the task at hand was running down other ships and taking what they had, possibly whilst under fire, or else escaping from those sent after them. An ideal pirate captain was thus the one best placed to functionally lead and prosecute the pirates' means of survival. Outside of this function, however, his authority diminished accordingly and he could be removed by the same crew that had appointed him at any time. This, in turn, informs us that in the change of conditions from merchant or naval ship to pirate ship the situation of power and authority had changed too. No longer is there a hierarchy of tyrants over oppressed crew. Now power lies in the community itself (not, in fact, unlike it did in various land-based revolutionary polities, such as that of the Diggers or the Ranters, by the middle of the seventeenth century). This leads us to consider the conditions under which men became pirates in the first place, namely the articles of association they composed by which they articulated their brotherhood. Stephen Snelders utilises the articles of the Welsh pirate Bartholomew Roberts (Black Bart) for this purpose and I shall follow him in setting out his articles below:

I . Every Man has a Vote in Affairs of Moment; has equal Title to the fresh Provisions, or strong Liquor, at any Time seized, and may use them at Pleasure, unless a Scarcity make it necessary, for the Good of all, to vote a Retrenchment.

II. Every Man to be called fairly in Turn, by List, on board Prizes, because (over and above their proper share) they were on Occasions allowed a Shift of Clothes; But if they defrauded the Company to the Value of a Dollar . . . MAROONING was their Punishment.

III. No Person to Game at Cards or Dice for Money. [An activity that was liable to cause dissension.]

IV. The Lights & Candles to be put out at eight o'Clock at Night. If any of the Crew, after that Hour, still remained inclined for Drinking, they were to do it on the open Deck.

V. To Keep their Piece, Pistols, & Cutlass clean, & fit for Service.

VI. No Boy or Woman to be allow'd amongst them. If any Man were found seducing any of the latter Sex, and carried her to Sea, he was to suffer Death.

VII. To desert the ship, or their quarters in battle, was punished with Death or Marooning.

VIII. No striking one another on Board, but every Man's Quarrels to be ended on Shore, at Sword and Pistol Thus: The Quarter-Master of the Ship, when the Parties will not come to any Reconciliation, accompanies them on Shore with what assistance he thinks proper, & turns the Disputants Back to Back, at so many Paces Distance. At the Word of Command, they turn and fire immediately, (or else the Piece is knocked out of their Hands). If both miss, they come to their Cutlasses, and then he is declared Victor who draws the first Blood.

IX. No Man to talk of breaking up their Way of Living, till each had shared 1000 pounds. If in order to this, any Man should lose a Limb, or become a Cripple in their Service, he was to have 800 Dollars, out of the public Stock, and for lesser Hurts, proportionably.

X. The Captain and Quarter-Master to receive two Shares of a Prize; the Master, Boatswain, & gunner, one Share and a half and other Officers, [mates, the carpenter, the surgeon] , one and a Quarter.

XI. The Musicians to have Rest on the Sabbath Day, but the other six Days & Nights, none without special Favor.

Here we can see several differences immediately as compared with former authoritarian conditions. One way non-pirate captains controlled or punished their crew, for example, was by denying them victuals. On a pirate ship, given the example of Black Bart's articles of association here which informed observers consider representative, each and every pirate had equal right of access to food, drink and liquor – unless it was necessary for the good of all to restrict rations generally. Prizes (from their captured booty) were awarded in order but stealing from the general company was an offence punishable by "marooning" – being left on an island by yourself – being expelled from the crew to your vast disadvantage, in other words. Games of chance were prohibited to prevent arguments whilst those who wanted to drink into the night were to do so without disturbing others generally. Women and children were forbidden (more on this shortly) whilst the crew were expected to have themselves ready for battle at all times. Desertion during a battle, when your crewmates needed you most, also accrued a punishment of death or marooning. There was a formal dispute procedure overseen by the Quartermaster, a figure as important as the captain often representative of the crew,

who oversaw routine tasks on board ship and arbitrated the disputes. Crewmen were expected to make their contribution to the polity before thinking of leaving again. A primitive form of social security ensured they would be compensated for injuries accrued as part of the company and its actions. Those with particular functions on board received extra shares of plunder and while the musicians on board could rest on Sundays, they were expected to play every other day unless they were given permission not to. Such is the polity of Jolly Roger and we can see it is focused on the community of free men.

Commenting on these articles, Snelders says:

"Articles from other pirate crews mentioned by Johnson show pretty much the same picture. In 1721, Lowther's pirates agreed that the use of a weapon against comrades on board the ship or any prize, cowardice in battle, not delivering plunder to the quartermaster for general distribution, gambling for money, or defrauding a comrade, would be punished as 'the Captain and Majority shall think fit.' In the distribution of the plunder the captain got two shares, the master one and a half, and other officers one and a quarter. For the loss of a limb one was given 150 pounds, 'and [can] remain with the Company as long as he shall think fit.' Lowther's crew also agreed to give 'good Quarters' when called for by their prizes. The men of John Phillips agreed in 1723 to give one and a half shares of the plunder to the captain and one and a quarter shares to other officers. Deserters were to be punished by marooning; theft from comrades by marooning or death; physical attacks against comrades by forty lashes on the bare back; smoking or lighting a candle in the hold without a cap or a lantern by forty lashes; poor maintenance of weapons by the loss of a share and other punishment 'as the Captain and Majority shall think fit'; and meddling with a woman without her consent by death. Loss of a joint or a limb was recompensed with between 400 and 800 pieces-of-eight."

Whether we think these articles of association “ideal” or not, they are clearly not authoritarian and hierarchical paternalism carried out in a disciplinary fashion and imposed on any who set foot on board the ship. Pirates, as one can see from even the brief introduction to them I have given here, were hard men schooled in, by and through violence and authoritarian oppression (which some did not survive) and this was nothing new to them. Violence was their business and also the means by which business was routinely done. Seen against this background, and keeping in mind Rediker’s assertion that they developed proclivities for collectivism, anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism, we can see these articles come as an almost revolutionary change of tack, to use a sailing metaphor. Most importantly, we must recall that these weren’t rules being imposed on anybody for pirates became pirates by choice and were free to leave, in the main, if they had done their bit for the crew (which was really the only way to prove your worth and gain a positive reputation).

Pirate crews were collectives in every sense and not joining in was viewed with utmost suspicion, not least because to sail a ship successfully was a dangerous business which required working together with absolute trust in those you sailed with. The pirate crew, according to Snelders, was governed by social interactions based on customs (their articles) and “strength of personality” – a proactive enthusiasm for the cause and the company. He calls pirate crews “an anarchic organisation of violent men” and this seems fair in the light of the research I have done. If you research actual pirates we can verify as real, you find that their lives were like fireworks, bright and violent but short. They were those who maximised their liberty together because they valued it most knowing that it could not last for long in a policed and incarcerating world.

Pirates thus lived and operated in a world of violence and negotiating and mitigating said violence was all of a piece with their existence. As a brotherhood of men that forged and maintained a tradition, they organised themselves in such ways as violence among them was limited and controlled. Their communities were about maximising personal and social liberty amongst them and limiting the violence, as an aspect of power and authority, that could be used against them from those outside or beyond them. One could label this “Utopian” but it was really just pragmatism given their lifestyle and options. They were not going to get very far carrying on as was the case on the hierarchical ships they had left behind. They needed a new set of relationships to experience a new and liberating kind of life and so they invented them for themselves.

Snelders tells us, in something that explains the “jolly” that goes along with “Old Roger”, that pirates attempted to live the life of an eternal festival. (It occurs to me that this is where the pirate historian and anarchist Peter Lamborn Wilson, i.e. Hakim Bey, got his idea of the “Temporary Autonomous Zone” from.) “The Devil’s Anarchy” was then a life opposed to the ways of the Christianised, authoritarian and civilised world that was all about the joys of working together for each other and carousing whilst doing it. Their symbology may have been “death, violence and the fleeting passage of time” but you will have noted that Black Bart’s articles also contained – as the first stipulation! – that every single crew member was entitled to all the liquor he could drink! Piracy, as a mentality and chosen lifestyle, was about freedom from authority and becoming your own lord not just some of the time but ALL of the time. For the pirate, as their symbols showed, the sense was that time, and so life, was passing away all of the time. So it is hardly surprising that “eat and drink for tomorrow we die” was largely how they thought. Life was thus there to be enjoyed in each moment – because each was very aware that none of them knew precisely how much of it they had left. The violence pirates had to live with, of

course, was not only in their pasts as lower members of wooden authoritarian hierarchies. Actual navies were looking to kill them and any regular engagement might take someone's life. In the last ten years of the Golden Age around 10% of pirates were executed – and that doesn't include the many others killed in engagement at sea. Reading the histories of known pirates of the Golden Age does not regale one with tales of those who enjoyed long life and who died of old age. A pirate's life could be short, just 3 or 4 years – and so they attempted to make it sweet. Snelders consequently reports this speech given to Black Bart (statistically the most successful pirate of the Golden Age but also one who was killed at sea) which gives us a sense of the pirate mentality:

"Damn to him who ever lived to wear a Halter. . . . In an honest Service, says he, there is thin Commons, low Wages, and hard Labour; in this [piracy], Plenty and Satiety, Pleasure and Care, Liberty and Power; and who would not balance Creditors on this Side, when all the Hazard that is run for it, at worst, is only a sour Look or two at choking. No, a merry Life and a short one, shall be my Motto."

Pirates were men who desired, and so chose, to live and fight for the enjoyment of physical pleasures (liquor and music are included in Black Bart's articles) and we should be very much aware that this was not the least of their motivations. Snelders then comments on this that:

"Whether instinctively or consciously, the pirates embraced a counterculture contradictory to the Protestant ethic that was triumphing in England, emphasizing the religious duty of working hard and avoiding the sins of idleness and over-indulgence in pleasures of the flesh. The ethic of Old Roger, which had been given public expression in the English Revolution by the Ranters, was the exact opposite of repressive Protestantism and, paradoxically, was

more akin to the libertinism of aristocratic cavaliers - with the added element of egalitarianism."

It has already been stated that pirates were men living in, and made by, a violent world. This is true. As a consequence, it must absolutely be noted that pirates were themselves men of violence rather than pacifists or principled men of non-violence. Such assertions would themselves be utterly ridiculous. Pirates shot, stabbed, cut, blew up, fired cannons at and generally killed or tortured people (and more especially people in charge!) if they needed to – and sometimes only if they wanted to. Their crews contained some seeming sadists who enjoyed meting out pain and we must imagine that at least some, if not many, had absolutely no love either for those they preyed upon (merchant vessels including their authoritarian officers) or those who came after them (navies in the service of governments). Revenge is noted in the literature as a prevalent pirate motivation. The piratologist David Cordingly, in his book *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and Reality of Life Among the Pirates*, puts it like this:

"Although some of the pirate violence reported by colonial governors was the work of sadists and men looking for kicks to relieve the boredom of their existence, this was not always the case. Many pirate crews only resorted to torture and murder to achieve specific ends. Violence was most commonly used to enable the pirates to find out as quickly as possible where the captain, the crew, and any passengers on board had hidden their valuables; it was also used deliberately to create a terrifying image. As word spread of pirate atrocities, it was hoped that future victims would surrender without a fight. Another motive behind many of the reported cruelties was revenge. Pirates were quick to avenge any attempt to curb their activities, and many atrocities were revenge attacks on islands or the ships of nations which had imprisoned or hanged pirates in the recent past."

Being guided by this assessment, pirate violence was functional and purposive rather than systemic or indiscriminate. More than one commentator suggests that, whilst pirates would not shy away from violence, they were more than happy if they could scare their targets into simple surrender. This was much better all round since then no member of the crew would be a casualty of conflict. But this required the reality of actual pirate violence to pull off. Potential prey had to believe absolutely that they were in physical danger of attack or death for this to work. The only way for that reality to be convincing was if it actually was. One consequence of this was that those ships who attempted to resist pirates – either by attempting to flee or deploying their own weaponry – were more harshly treated. Cordingley tells us in the same source that “Ships’ captains who hid or refused to reveal the whereabouts of valuables could expect no mercy.” The message here is clear: give us what we want and things will go better for everyone. “No mercy” could and did include forms of torture – of which the ship, pirate and non-pirate, had developed many forms from beating with whips, ropes or cords to stretching limbs until they popped. A favourite appears to have been burning matches between fingers or toes, potentially until the recalcitrant victim burned alive rather than giving up his secrets. Pirates were not pussy cats. No one at sea was.

But here we must also make the point, one of the most important to remember about pirates and piracy generally, that *no two pirates, or pirate ships, were the same*. It is often a grave and self-deceiving error to generalise about pirates and doing so always mischaracterises people who were fundamentally defined by their independence. What one pirate crew did need not be what another one did. There are as many, if not more, cases of pirates taking what they needed and letting people go unharmed as there are of unhinged massacres or prolonged and unnecessary tortures. One needs to remember that pirates were practical people who had functions to fulfill in order to live as they

chose to. Prolonging their lives of piracy was the aim on which all their actions focused. This might sometimes require extreme violence but surely not every time. Pirates were not the merchant or naval captains under whom they had nearly uniformly served and their violence was much more sparing and functional (rather than systemic) as a result. A perfect example here is marooning, a form of violence in which men were left on often uninhabited islands to their fate. This could happen to both enemies or to members of pirate crews that transgressed the agreed polity. Marooning, however, shows how pirate violence was a matter of consequences. It wasn't an habitual, automatic or systemic action. As Stephen Snelders reports, pirates lived outside the borders of a civilisationally defined order of good and evil. They made their own law and behaved as they liked within the confines of their own customs. This varied from pirate to pirate and ship to ship and case to case.

I turn now to following Gabriel Kuhn's *Life Under the Jolly Roger* more closely and especially the third chapter which discusses pirate culture. I followed Kuhn's book in a major way before when discussing pirates in *Black Flag* and this was not simply because I agreed with him – since I often didn't. Kuhn does have a way of raising pertinent issues, however, and this was why I took his narrative as a guide. Of first importance here, something I picked up much earlier in this piece about pirates, is that pirates were an *ethos* of their own. For me this functions as a marker of anarchy in a way it does not for Kuhn (because Kuhn thinks of anarchy in terms of a world polity of general benevolence that pirates could never stand in for or represent). Pirates, however, we can both agree, were not overt anarchists – they were pirates pirating. They were men who lived their own lives to their own standards. For me, that is anarchy in a way it is not for Kuhn. Either way, I think it is an *ethos*. Kuhn, in his account, seems to delight in not letting people build “pirate utopias” or idealistic constructions based on conclusions made about pirates. In

this I think he is too dogmatic in his own way, most particularly when it comes to piracy and anarchy. I think that comes down to too much idealising of his own kind about what anarchy MUST look like in a pre-determined way. I concentrate on what anarchy has looked like and can look like. It has looked like pirates (and it can look like them too).

The ethnic and ethical point, the point that pirates created an ethos ("the characteristic spirit of a culture") of their own, is an important one in all of this. In doing so, they became Rediker's "villains of all nations" but also villains of no nation and of their own, outlaw nation. They consciously existed, with their own flag of allegiance, the flag of carousing devilment, outside of the civilised world, a world upon which they preyed. Kuhn says of this:

"The eventual rejection of any national allegiance marks the biggest difference between the golden age pirates and the buccaneers who preceded them. Among the golden age pirates, the anti-national notion becomes stronger, not least in the adoption of the Jolly Roger as their truly transnational symbol... Pirates doubly defied the nationalist logic ... first by forming themselves of the 'outcasts of all nations' (mixing together the seafarers of all countries, as suggested earlier), and second by attacking vessels regardless of the flag flying at the mainmast, making all nations and their shipping equal prey..."

At the same time, it is without doubt true that in a world increasingly dominated by the nation-state system, it became an issue of first importance that pirates 'had not any Commission from any Prince or Potentate,' and that they posed a significant threat to the nation-state—both confirmed by their reputation as 'banditti of all nations' and the fact that legal scholars have called piracy the 'first international crime.'... we must not forget the symbolic significance of a free-roaming community under a non-nation-state flag,

especially in light of the ever increasing regulation of migration and border control. The golden age pirates' obvious defiance of any such notions must stand as a powerful reminder of how things ought to be, and as an unrelenting protest against conditions that force millions of people every year to cross borders under hazardous circumstances. Many of these people do not survive these crossings—some of them drown in the very waters that the golden age pirates once proudly roamed. By taunting the nation-state, the golden age pirates expressed a simple truth: namely, that 'it signified nothing what part of the World a man liv'd in, so he Liv'd well'."

Pirates, then, were not just renegades from Christian polity but also from the nation states of civilisation. They rejected the very idea of "nation" for a voluntaristic ethos of brotherhood made by and for its members alone (an association). This, too, is anarchy; it is heresy and apostasy and social rebellion, acts of cultural production, things which include both "opportunistic unions" and "pragmatic interests". Individual pirates, we should remain convinced, almost certainly came along with the prejudices they had learned in civilisation. These could be gendered, racial, religious, nationalistic, etc. But the emerging and self-actualised pirate ethos was a move towards something new and different, something that should never be judged by the standards of twenty first century identity politics. Piracy was a self-arbitrating polity of its own. It did not care what outsiders thought for it had chosen not to care about that and, indeed, to differentiate itself from it. Pirates were creating a freedom to create their own context of shared existence as inculcated through their articles of association and connected traditions. This, at a minimum, created new contexts for shared existence that had not existed before and which perhaps does not often exist without them.

This brings us to more specific pirate matters and the first of these is women. We saw above in the articles of Black Bart that women were strictly forbidden to the extent that bringing a woman aboard would result in the death of the pirate doing so. It is not entirely clear why. Commentators point out that some thought women at sea bad luck. Then there was the obvious potential for dissension to break out between members of the crew over a woman. A further consideration is that life at sea was hard, requiring physical strength, and for many women it simply would not have been a realistic possibility, a fact which may have led to a general judgment on the part of pirates in regard to women whole and entire. Some seem to think of pirates as women haters but this is surely ridiculous when numerous ports at the time of their existence could tell tales of pirates surging ashore to enjoy the pleasures of love in a woman's company. It seems to me, as I have already said before, that pirates were extremely functional people – and so women had their functions just like anything or anyone else.

Two female scholars, Ulrike Klausmann and Marion Meinzerin, have their own take on this across various kinds of piracy generally but not least in relation to the period and type I am here specifically discussing in their book *Women Pirates and the Politics of the Jolly Roger*. Most particular this concerns the two most famous female pirates, who are confirmed as real people, Anne Bonny, an Irishwoman, and Mary Read, an Englishwoman. Both grew up disguised as boys, Bonny being born as something of an embarrassment to her father outside wedlock and Read as the daughter of a single mother who had previously lost a son that died whereupon her mother simply pretended that the later and illegitimate Mary was the son, and as adults found that they could best secure their continued existence by dressing as men, a trick that was not totally unknown at the time as scholars have discovered when researching the issue. Both Anne and Mary eventually ended up as pirates on the same ship, that of the pirate Calico Jack (which was fortunate

for them given that we know other ships and crews might have rejected them out of hand or worse), where they disclosed their secret identities to each other (when they took a fancy to each other) and to the captain on a “need to know” basis. Here, however, something Klausmann and Meinzerin note is of importance:

“there were few women among the colonialists. In the eyes of the European rulers, this was the reason that white men were entering into long-term relationships with black women, and it conflicted with their racist ideals. It was acceptable as long as a white men raped his slaves, or at worst punished them, because he had ‘disgraced himself before God and shamed all Christians by dirtying his body and lying with a Negro woman.’ But to live together with a black woman, or to have a child with her, was forbidden. In the French areas, for example, a white man who had a child with a black woman was required to pay a penalty of 2,000 pounds of sugar. The woman would be sent to a special ‘home,’ and could not be bailed out at any price.

Concern for the preservation of the white race finally prompted the governments and trade companies to organise a kind of trade in girls and women overseas. The Dutch East India Company paid a reward to every family going to Batavia who took at least two daughters of eight years or older along. There were additional payments for ‘respectable young maidens’ brought along from orphanages. This group of girls was under the governor’s direct guardianship. They were only allowed to marry company employees or free citizens—and that only with the governor’s permission.”

Anne Bonny came to piracy by way of being brought to the colonies by her father. But she ran off with the first sailor who caught her eye (she was, as you might imagine, the rebellious sort) and thereafter fled to the pirate haven of New Providence, leaving a

charge of attempting to kill her father behind her as she did. The historical situation at the time, however, as Klausmann and Meinzerin inform us, was that:

"Women were forced to acquire a man as protection, for a woman who belonged to no man effectively belonged to all of them. Married women were in every sense their husband's property; husbands could sell or kill their wives with impunity. This was the fate of one-eyed Hawkins, who had been auctioned publicly by her husband. For the crime of absconding from her second owner, Hawkins was captured and sent as a slave in chains to Virginia. She again succeeded in escaping, this time to New Providence."

This, however, is only to speak of the few white, European women who made it to the colonies. As for the black or native women:

"they had to work as slaves and were treated by the white rulers as sexual objects, or as birthing machines for making new slaves. According to the situation on the market, they would sometimes be prevented from having children, and sometimes forced to have them. There were times when it was more affordable to buy than to breed... when it had become more difficult to capture blacks in Africa, sixteen-year old slave women were forced to become mothers, and agricultural associations felt no shame in labelling seventeen-year old girls who had already borne several children 'good breeders,' as though they were cattle or swine."

Does that sound familiar, Immortan Joe?

Anne Bonny would, as stated, run away from her father in the colonies with a sailor (James Bonny) whom she married but that did not last. She would meet Calico Jack (John

Rackam) in the pirate den of New Providence and join his crew, also having a child after becoming his lover. They met Mary Read when she, seeking her fortune by acting as a man in male settings such as the infantry or merchant shipping, signed onto a merchant vessel bound for the West Indies which was captured by pirates. She was the only crew member of the merchant vessel the pirates insisted come with them. And so she would eventually meet Anne Bonny and Calico Jack. One might wonder how Bonny and Read got away with hanging around with pirates when they seem so strictly and uniformly male companies – even having articles which demand this as did those of Black Bart we saw above which were not unusual. Lest we think that they must have had very good disguises, it must immediately be pointed out that this did not seem to be the case. Perhaps the disguises might fool the casual or brief acquaintance in the hustle and bustle of every day life but ships were not the places for such occasions. The reasoning for Bonny and Read's action itself is explained by the simple fact that men had many more economic opportunities than women. If you could pass as a man this was then an active economic option for a better chance of survival. To live as a woman put you in a very different situation to a man. Klausmann and Meinzerin, for example, report that:

"There were plenty of reasons to attempt such a switch. In the eighteenth century women had no opportunity to determine their own lives. A woman who married did little more than change her effective owner from her father to her husband, who could do with her as he pleased. Women could not move freely without male 'protection,' and so it became a custom that a woman who desired to travel alone disguised herself as a man."

Imagine, then, the attraction of the pirate ship to the woman who could brave, and pass within, the male environment. To pass in an all male community, being a woman, was to achieve a great leap forward in one's own personal liberty. But this was not without huge

risk. Many pirate crews would, with certainty, have rejected the likes of Bonny and Read absolutely out of hand (and who knows to what end result). But, as I have already made it important to note, all ships, crews and captains were different. What one did did not bind the others. Bonny and Read were fortunate, then, to find themselves meeting Calico Jack rather than, say, Black Bart or Blackbeard who were much more militant pirates that would not have accepted them. We may be sure, however, that Bonny and Read were known to be women by the crew of Calico Jack's ship since conditions on board made it virtually impossible that they could not be discovered:

"That the majority of women who are known to us as transvestites were involved at sea or in the military may well be attributable to the fact that these are the areas where a woman was most likely to be discovered. (Scholars) describe how difficult it was to hide one's sex on a ship. There was as good as no privacy on board. Several persons would sleep together in narrow quarters, and there was no certainty of not being seen when going to the toilet. Washing and changing did not pose too much of a risk, as this was actually infrequent behaviour given the ideas at that time about hygiene. But discovery could cost the woman her life. As it says in the Bible: "A woman Shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 22:5, King James Revised). Reason enough, in the view of the authorities, to level the death penalty for transvestites.

In 1643, King Charles I of England decreed the following law: 'No woman shall falsify her sex by wearing a man's clothing. She subjects herself thusly to the strictest penalty that the Law or Our wrath may ordain.'"

As it happens, we are told by near contemporaneous sources that Bonny and Read dressed as men when fighting as pirates or on the hunt for targets but at other times on board they dressed as women. How they managed to become accepted and co-exist amongst the crew as equals, however, can be put down to two reasons:

First, Calico Jack was no big shot of Golden Age piracy. In fact, he is probably only known because of Anne Bonny and Mary Read. As David Cordingly says in *Under the Black Flag*:

"There is no record of Calico Jack using torture or murder, and he seems to have gone out of his way to treat his victims with restraint. When he had finished looting a Madeira ship, he returned the vessel to her master and arranged for Hosea Tisdale, a Jamaican tavern keeper, to be given a passage home. Compared to Bartholomew Roberts and Blackbeard, who commanded forty-gun warships and sailed into action with a flotilla of supporting vessels, Calico Jack was a small-time pirate. He preferred to operate with a modest sloop, and he restricted his attacks to small fishing boats and local trading ships. His chief claim to fame lay not in his exploits during his two years as a pirate captain but in his association with the female pirates Mary Read and Anne Bonny, whose lives were considerably more adventurous and interesting than his own."

Second, and most importantly, Anne Bonny and Mary Read must have made *bloody good pirates*. They had to. They had to probably out-perform most of the male crew in order to compensate for their sex disadvantage. They could only be accepted as equals if they in fact were the equal of any man on board. We are here in the same territory as we were much earlier in this "queer apocalypse" when talking about Furiosa in Mad Max or the Amazons in terms of the Greek quality of *andreia*. Bonny and Read were masculine females as well as experienced transvestites. There is something of necessity in this but it

was still their choice to pursue it at their own potential cost. Gabriel Kuhn, as is his way, tries to make something negative out of this – it meant Bonny and Read denying their femininity – “just as freedom meant noble status for a man, it meant male status for a woman” – but I think this is a harsh assessment. Kuhn also says that Bonny and Read succeeded entirely through their own efforts rather than because of pirate radicality but, again, I think he goes too far. Such a sentiment completely overlooks that some pirates would have rejected them outright and that, as I say again, all pirates were different. There was no one pirate response to such a situation and, indeed, if there had been it would have been a denial of the fundamental independence which was at the root of all piracy. Kuhn wants to try and argue that pirates were not as radical as some modern commenters or activists would wish to make them but such arguments are an irrelevance. Calico Jack’s pirates did know that Bonny and Read were women physically but the fact that they pirated as good as any man among them gave them the acceptance, male or female, that only it could. And that says something about both these pirates AND Anne Bonny and Mary Read without any doubt whatsoever. It also tells us that Bonny and Read must have been violent for piracy was advanced through violence and taking part in the company of “anarchic violent men” was how any pirate proved their own piratical credentials. Anne Bonny and Mary Read could, consequently, not have been shy, retiring females. They were fighters and were as ready to use violence as any of the men on board. Klausmann and Meinzerin in fact recount tales that speak to this fact on behalf of both women:

“Anne Bonny took pains to maintain her rough image, for example by severely beating one fellow who annoyed her with a chair, or by relieving her fencing master of his buttons during a duel, one by one, with the point of her dagger.

There are stories about Mary Read as well, of how she would challenge opponents to duels and kill them without remorse. One source diverges from Daniel Defoe's report. In her book, Storia della Pirateria del mondo, Anna Franchi writes of a conflict between Mary Read and a helmsman, a man who knew, as did the rest of the pirates, that Mary was a woman, although at the time she was still dressing as a man. The helmsman refused to obey Mary's orders, and slapped her in the face. She promptly challenged him to a duel. In keeping with the usual law on pirate ships, she asked for permission to duel with him at the next landing. Once on land, the helmsman wanted to back out, but Mary insisted on restoring her honour. His gun did not fire. Mary, now certain of her life, approached him, opened her shirt, showed him her pale breasts, and said: 'You wretch, you knew I was a woman and yet you dared to strike me. This woman shall now kill you, to make an example for all who would dare to insult her.' And she blew out his brains."

Such stories show that, regardless of sex or gender expectations, a pirate was, in some pirate company, simply one who convincingly played pirate. If you did the job, that was good enough. As David Cordingly puts this: "These and other women were able to survive in a man's world by proving themselves as capable as the men in battle and in their duties as seamen." There was no other way they could survive. Further, and to contradict Kuhn once more, this DOES say something about pirates in distinction to regular society – for Bonny and Read would have only found acceptance, if at all, in a gendered woman's role and social status there: they would have needed "a man's protection" and possibly had to take up prostitution, the ultimate fallback position for any woman in a man's, male-created world. But at least among pirates, with their own ways and customs, you could prove yourself beyond the strict strictures of such a dogmatically gendered polity and so explode society's boundaries and expectations for womanhood. Pirates, thus, WERE different and, to that extent, (more) radical.

But did this argued for radicality express itself in other ways that might be of interest? I think it did – and specifically SEXUALLY. Multiple commentators suggest that pirates may have preferred unmarried shipmates. To some extent this fits with the common prohibition against women and children which were, one might argue, simple matters of practicality at sea. One cannot be an effective pirate vessel with families on board. Of course, a further option is that men had “run away to sea” and left family responsibilities behind in a past life. But what did these men then do for love or companionship in a now all male community? The French buccaneer Alexandre Exquemelin wrote a contemporaneous account of his experiences as a buccaneer in the years immediately before the Golden Age. In his book he wrote of the system known as the *matelotage* system as follows:

“It is a general and solemn custom amongst them all to seek out for a comrade or companion, whom we may call partner, in their fortunes, with whom they join the whole stock of what they possess, towards a mutual and reciprocal gain. This is done also by articles drawn and signed on both sides, according to what has been agreed between them. Some of these constitute their surviving companion absolute heir to what is left by the death of the first of the two. Others, if they be married, leave their estates to their wives and children; others to other relations.”

Matelotage was a system in which men took male companions amongst the buccaneers. It could be described as a civil and voluntary union of two men, irrespective of other relations. But we can go further than this and speak of undisputed homosexuality amongst pirates. Klausmann and Meinzerin, for example, in speculating whether Bonny and Read were lesbian lovers (a possibility they imagine their contemporaries would have been completely unable to comprehend in their time even though Bonny and Read were

themselves reported as being found in bed together), tell us that “homosexuality among men was no secret”. B.R. Burg, in his *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition*, argues that homosexual sex was not an exclusive form of sexuality amongst pirates but a form often engaged in. Gabriel Kuhn notes that no pirate articles have ever been discovered which forbade it – which is significant when one realises that, in the civilised world, it was uniformly forbidden and, indeed, drew a formal sentence of death in both male (gay) and female (lesbian) cases. In the Christianised world of liberal polity homosexuality (although it had not yet been recognised as such and was thus more usually denominated, in a very male-centric way, as the act of “sodomy” – anal sex) was outlawed and forbidden so would not a free community that had sprung up in great contradiction to political and moral normality feel free to go its own way? The English writer Daniel Defoe, much interested in pirates during his career which was contemporaneous with the Golden Age, shows evidence of knowing that pirate crews were significantly made up of those not averse to homosexual activity, then thought of as an individual crime. This would have affected women, however, too since both men and women had the same societies and cultures in common and so would have imbibed the same cultural values. Writing about this is the context of Bonny and Read, Klausmann and Meinzerin say:

“Love relationships among women where one of them did not play a man were not even perceived as such. It barely posed a threat to the men of the eighteenth century when a woman in women’s clothing loved a woman in women’s clothing. On the contrary, as Lilian Fadermann concludes in Koestlicher als die Liebe der Männer [More Delicious than the Love of Men]—a study of romantic and passionate relationships between upper-class women in previous centuries—men often had no objections to such relationships. Fathers were reassured that the ‘honour’ of their daughters, meaning their highly valued ‘virginity,’ was not endangered. A husband did not need fear that another man was ‘putting the horns’ on

him, meaning that his wife might bear the child of another man as his heir. The female friends were not seen as competitors. They could not endanger a marriage, for women were economically dependent on their men.

But when women dressed as men, when they had the temerity to claim the privileges of a man, to live independently or freely choose a profession—insofar as class differences allowed—then lesbian love became punishable. Of course, transvestites were persecuted even when no love relationship with a woman could be demonstrated.

(The scholars) Dekker and Pol point out that milder punishments were always meted out to transvestites who disguised themselves as men out of love for a man, for example, in order to accompany a lover on his ship. The strictest punishments were reserved for women in male clothing who had a love relationship with a woman, or even married a woman, which was not uncommon. Most of the latter who were discovered were burned at the stake or hanged."

We can see here that, in terms of sexuality and gender, those in the early 1700s were living in a world very different to our own. Yet it would have been the values and culture of that time that our pirates would have had to imaginatively and actively think themselves out of and so beyond – if it ever occurred to them to do so (which we should imagine it did not in every case). This, by the by, is also true of modern commentators on former piracy, not all of whom seem personally disposed to even the reality of homosexuality itself. Accordingly, many play down its actuality whilst, of course, not denying its strict possibility. The suggestive fact remains, however, as Kuhn notes, that "life in the pirate settlements offered greater latitude of individual behaviour than anywhere else." It would certainly have been safer to be a gay pirate than to be a gay

member of a merchant or naval vessel or a gay member of land-lubbing normal society. The point can be made here that if one was a gay pirate, or one not averse to gay sexual contact as part of a more all-encompassing sexual proclivity, then among fellow pirates was the place that this was, on the whole, least likely to be judged.

The scholar who is most in favour of the idea of significant homosexuality amongst pirates is B.R. Burg. Since pirates did not keep records of their regular sexual encounters or their orientations (sexual orientation not even being an idea that had yet been invented) Burg, to some extent, makes his arguments by analogy to other all-male environments about which some scientific statistical work has been done (military environments and prisons). Consequently, he makes observations such as the following:

"sexual activity in prisons increases, sometimes to rather high rates, as the order of custody is lowered. If freedom from social and behavioral constraints increased sexual activity for buccaneers as it apparently does for convicts, then the West Indian sea rovers surely made the most of their liberty. Many were men with abiding hatreds of rules and regulations acquired after terms of service in the merchant and naval services. They gloried in the freedom or license they enjoyed as buccaneers, and, if research on modern convicts does in fact provide clues to pirate behavior, it seems likely enough that their joy in exercising their wills was not confined only to the non-sexual phases of their lives."

In addition to this the obvious point must be made that the only sexual possibilities available to men at sea for extended periods were either to masturbate (in places that were not necessarily that private at all as previously mentioned – which basically suggests any masturbation was likely to become public masturbation at any time) or activities with other men. Only when making landfall in the wider world in either some pirate enclave or

a town or village populated by others of the outside world could the possibility for heterosexual encounters be entertained (rape of potential female captives aside). Pirates were not exactly unknown for their proclivity for wild debauches of dancing, music and sex after successful raids but, it seems to me, it would be an overly brave observer who then stipulated that the debauchery they enjoyed or engaged in would be strictly of one sexual kind or another. Besides, on land the rules of the sea (particularly in regard to women) were not so immediately applicable and one could indulge oneself with partners of any sex or sexual preference with impunity. In this regard, however, Burg makes the following commentary:

"In their relationships with women, pirates seemed to prefer situations where the females could easily be dominated. Native women, under this circumstance, made excellent sexual partners for men inclined to vary their largely male experiences. They were heathen, dark-skinned, and regarded as moral, spiritual, and racial inferiors by xenophobic English or European pirates. Native sexual customs that differed in substance from those familiar to pirates also contributed toward easing psychological disabilities in dealing with members of the opposite sex. Most commentators noted that native women could be bought easier than raped, Captain William Cowley remarking that in one tribe the men had no qualms about sharing their wives with Europeans but were intensely jealous over advances made by other tribesmen. Another pirate noted that native females were quite willing to submit to the desires of Englishmen, and William Betagh added that 'any man may lye with the [California Indian] women for a rusty knife, or a porringer of thick milk'...

Aboard the Revenge, commanded by pirate John Phillips, the crew adopted as one of their regulations an article stating 'If at any Time we meet with a prudent Woman, that Man that offers to meddle with her, without her Consent, shall suffer present Death,' and a member

of Bartholomew Roberts's crew, a pirate nicknamed Little David, actually set himself up as guard and protector of a captured woman. One man could not have done this aboard any pirate ship without at least the tacit consent of his comrades, and although Little David raped his charge in short order, it is nonetheless true that there was some effort to preserve her honor that was sanctioned by the crew. There are numerous other examples of men who were no respectors either of property or persons striving to prevent the abuse of captured women. One of the rules posted by William Betagh's crew in 1719 stated that 'Every man aboard a prize found drunk, or in any indecent act with a white or black women, to be punished according to the nature of his offense.' There were without doubt sound tactical reasons for such a regulation, but had the crew been lusting for women over months or even years, rules of that nature would not have been promulgated by men with little respect for law, custom, or the persons of captives. In another incident, a pirate crew killed all the males on a ship they had taken, but the one female found aboard was not raped or sexually abused in any way. She was simply tossed overboard in the fashion of any other unwanted material."

What we learn from these comments is that pirates were neither simply rapists nor simply interested in women as sexual objects. Some, no doubt, were (heterosexual) rapists and took their opportunities as they found them. But we must, once again, remember not to generalise – either about a pirate's proclivity to rape or his desire for women generally. There is, in fact, further information here to digest:

"The use of boys as sexual partners was not universally accepted among pirates. Some captains rejected the practice entirely, not because they were particularly repelled by notions of pederasty, but because they evidently believed the boys were a cause of conflict aboard ship. The men who served under Bartholomew Roberts were especially emphatic in

this regard. They subscribed to a set of articles that provided 'No Boy or Women [was] to be allowed amongst them. If any Man were found seducing any of the latter Sex, and carry'd her to Sea, disguis'd, he was to suffer Death.' Significantly, there was no penalty for seducing a lad or smuggling him aboard. Pederasty was simply a violation of the rules not a capital crime."

What then might we imagine as a general picture (remembering that generalisation in regard to pirates is dubious at the best of times)?:

"The suitability of almost every member of a pirate crew as a sex partner for almost every other man means that aboard ship the potential for wide-spread promiscuity existed, but it is not entirely certain whether pirates availed themselves of the opportunities for frequent shifting of partners or for group sexual experiences. Several studies of homosexual patterns in large American cities indicate that promiscuity is fairly common, with many cases being reported of men having hundreds of partners within fairly limited time periods. The social imperatives that substantiate permanence among heterosexual couples—economic necessity, religious beliefs, the presence of family, and peer pressure—are all considerably reduced in the case of homosexuals, but among buccaneers (and the later pirates of the Golden Age) they were entirely absent. The constantly changing composition of any ship's crew due to deaths from natural causes, desertion, those killed in combat, and the frequent arrival of men and boys captured aboard other vessels all may have made relationships of long duration between pirates difficult to perpetuate."

The point I think I would make here is that, in pirate society, the situation was not as in the legalised and Christianised world beyond the flag of the Jolly Roger. Homosexuality was an accepted part of life, a proclivity which some enjoyed and others engaged in or

accepted in others. Sexuality, we may imagine, was entertained, in the spirit of constant festival and “the temporary autonomous zone”, on the same basis as everything else according to the pirate way and as a need to be satisfied as acquired and without breaking pirate custom – which was the most important thing. Pirate communities would certainly have been more open to everything from gay sex and pederasty to heterosexual sex outside wedlock than those in civilisation would have been in their much more policed environments. They no doubt availed themselves of foreign women, prostitutes, captives, youths and each other as they could and desired to. As Gabriel Kuhn then notes:

“Among the men of this seafaring community, there was no need to hide sexual orientation, and the anxieties, psychological disruptions, and psychopathological difficulties that often result from this type of guilt and repression did not emerge...”

The almost universal homosexual involvement among pirates meant homosexual practices were neither disturbed, perverted, exotic, nor uniquely desirable among them, and the mechanisms for defending and perpetuating such practices, those things that set the modern homosexual apart from heterosexual society, were never necessary. The male engaging in sexual activity with another male aboard a pirate ship in the West Indies three centuries past was simply an ordinary member of his community, completely socialized and acculturated.”

In this, I think the most important thing to remember is what a pirate was and what a pirate was signifying in his existence with others as pirates. Piracy was a life of crime, the life of a deliberate and wilful outlaw. “Outlaw” means “beyond the law”, “in defiance of the law” and “completely disregarding of the law” all in one. It was a way of life voluntarily chosen for which one could, as many did, pay a high price. Pirates lived that life below

“the banner of King Death” (as Marcus Rediker reports it in his book *Outlaws of the Atlantic*), a banner which was simultaneously signalling that the crew flew in the face of Christianity under a banner of allegiance to the Devil. It was a banner of those who flew in the face of established society and the civilisation it touted as the best and most progressive, the society of the nation state. It was the banner of those who, mostly, had escaped a world in which they were formerly incarcerated in wooden floating prisons subject to a severe and arbitrary discipline. As Marcus Rediker in the same source states:

“The pirate captain or quartermaster asked the seamen of the captured vessel who among them would serve under black colors, and frequently several stepped forward. Many fewer pirates originated as mutineers who had boldly and collectively seized control of a merchant vessel. But regardless of their methods, pirates necessarily came from seafaring employments, whether the merchant service, the navy, or privateering. Piracy emphatically was not an option open to landlubbers, since sea robbers ‘entertain’d so contemptible a Notion of Landmen’... Almost without exception, pirates, like the larger body of seafaring men, came from the lower class of humanity. They were, as a royal official condescendingly observed, ‘desperate Rogues’ who could have little hope in life ashore. These traits served as bases of unity when men of the sea decided, in search of something better, to become pirates.”

Pirates, according to Rediker, considered themselves “risk-sharing partners” in a common venture. We can see, above, how Black Bart’s articles of association favoured the preservation and maintenance of the collectivity – which was their main concern – and we have learned that it was a festal collectivity, about a life to be enjoyed for as long as it lasted. So it is important to note that this was a collectivity of free men (and occasionally free masculine women) and that this freedom was fundamental to the survival of the

collective as a new and different social development. As a consequence, crews were tightly bonded by their common mentality, traditions and desires to associate. They developed their own, unique socialities, not just as a common brotherhood but from ship to ship. Pirate ships, as many commentators confirm, never attacked each other. They attacked those who were not pirates. They had a collective sense of themselves which included what Rediker calls “a collective sense of transgression”. It was not that a pirate might offend another pirate (though this was always a possibility) but that he might offend the collective and its ways. Crewmen who simply didn’t fit in were likely to be marooned as disruptive to the ship and its community in general and not because they had had an argument with a particular crew member. Personal disputes were likely to be resolved man to man at the next stop. As Rediker here adds: “The social relations of piracy were marked by vigorous, often violent, antipathy toward traditional authority. The pervasive anti-authoritarianism of the culture of the common seafarer found many expressions beneath the Jolly Roger.” Pirates, we may say, shared a common consciousness and it was a consciousness in, and of, the common.

They had a group identity of which the Jolly Roger is the most obvious demonstration. It demonstrated that pirates wished to terrify their prey, the detested owners and operators of merchant ships or naval vessels, whilst simultaneously making their allegiances plain in symbolic forms they had determined themselves. As Rediker expounds upon this:

“The self-righteousness of pirates was strongly linked to a world—traditional, mythical, or Utopian—‘in which men are justly dealt with,’ as described by (the historian Eric) Hobsbawm. It found expression in their social rules, their egalitarian social organization, and their notions of revenge and justice. By walking ‘to the Gallows without a Tear,’ by

calling themselves 'Honest Men' and 'Gentlemen,' and by speaking self-servingly but proudly of their 'Conscience' and 'Honor,' pirates flaunted their certitude. When, in 1720, ruling groups concluded that 'nothing but force will subdue them,' many pirates responded by intensifying their commitment. Edward Low's crew in 1724 swore 'with the most direful Imprecations, that if ever they should find themselves overpower'd they would immediately blow their ship up rather than suffer themselves to be hang'd like Dogs.' These sea robbers would not "do Jolly Roger the Disgrace to be struck." The consciousness of kind among pirates manifested itself in an elaborate social code. Through rule, custom, and symbol, the code prescribed specific behavioral standards intended to preserve the social world that pirates had creatively built for themselves. As the examples of revenge reveal, royal officials recognized the threat of the pirates' alternative order. Some authorities feared that pirates might "set up a sort of Commonwealth"—and they were precisely correct in their designation—in uninhabited regions, since 'no Power in those Parts of the World could have been able to dispute it with them.' But the consciousness of kind never took national shape, and piracy was soon suppressed."

It remains only to ask, at this juncture, if pirates could be inspirational to those of us who read of them three centuries after their swift demise as we wander through the Wasteland. Stephens Snelders (as with Gabriel Kuhn in my own *Black Flag*) thinks not:

"Attempts to cast the pirates as role models for social liberation are too simplistic, if only because of the ethical problematic of their activities: particularly as regards the violence they directed not only against the 'great' but also against more defenseless victims. This ambiguity cannot, and I think need not be resolved. We must attempt to understand pirates from the perspective of the violent world in which they lived, and consider the context of the incarcerated life of common sailors."

Snelders, as Kuhn before him, seems to be suffering from moral qualms induced by his own social and cultural location which the pirates he has written about, one imagines, would have (quite rightly) laughed at. He seems happy to leave pirates as men of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and relativise them as moral inferiors in consequence. There can be no doubt, as Snelders later recognises, that pirates “brought not only liberation and pleasure, but also death and violence”. Is this a problem? For the fact is that Snelders and all of us live in a world right now based on ever increasing, systemic and institutionalised violence of the sort that pirates directly reacted against and sought revenge upon in pursuit of their own measures of both survival and freedom. It remains a fantasy case that, perhaps, if the pirates had managed to turn a small floating rebellion into an entire way of life then the much more incarcerating and systemically violent world we are living in may never have even come to pass.

The pirates wouldn't have cared about that, however, and it certainly wasn't their aim. They caroused, debauched, fought and loved for themselves, for however short a time – and it was enough. They had no pretension to be the architects of a new global politics. Some see that as their failure. Others may see it as their greatest characteristic. In order to generate survival in the Wasteland no one must ever seek to rule over it.

“A merry life and a short one shall be my motto.”

Green

Queer

Erotic

Love

Magic



CONTENTS

Green (774)

Queer (788)

Erotic (818)

Love (824)

Magic (897)

THE INCIPIT REDUX

Escaping the incarcerating city, its polluting, industrial chains slipped,
The feral wildness calls with songs of vital madness and networked green succulence.

Order is transfigured but not abandoned in the verdant grove,
Civilisation is defied and abandoned for queer and ancient reality.

Here is intimacy, viscosity and energy, in the heart of Nysa's son,
Erotic reality changes consciousness and creates naturalistic and fruitful vines.

Coercion has disappeared from this world as love rushes in,
Love that is unfettered, unrestricted, that grows everywhere like ivy.

Let us share this madness together, exploitation a faded memory,
Let us dance and move together in a world made of transforming magic and what can be
imagined.



GREEN

It is the time of monsters.

The time of desolation.

The time of dull, mechanical acquisition.

The time of over-consumption.

Billionaires in their Bond lairs dream of controlling the world with their "AI", unaware that they are the robots whose intelligence is artificial.

Compassionless.

Unfeeling.

Consumed by greed and power.

Self-programmed to follow their own orders.

The master criminal has summoned the other criminals to give fealty with the promise that they may act unfettered provided they acknowledge his kingship.

And so they assembled and did worship, concocting new horrors even as they did.

We shall spy on the population.

We shall cheat them.

Exploit them.

Control them.

Manipulate them.

They shall not do anything we do not know about or countenance.

They will live their lives in our controlled space.

No more pretending.

We shall do it openly.

All hail the king.

All hail his power.

All hail death.

“Let us beware of saying that death is opposed to life.

The living is merely a type of what is dead, and a very rare type.”

Thus spoke Zarathustra.

Meanwhile, in the forest, beyond the concrete, glass and steel, a different atmosphere pre-dominates.

Green.

Green, yet so vulnerable.

Life, profuse and profligate.

Life, attractive and vibrant.

Life, cooperative and interactive.

Green.

It was all so simple, once upon a time.

Before the kings came there was just life, just green.

But now poison seeps into the green.

Men with machines come to crop and clear it.

Horror upon horror.

Mass murder.

Torture.

The earth dies screaming.

But they cannot hear its screams

For they think it is just dead resources.

They think that what they can possess is theirs.

And life is irrelevant.

The green turns red.
The red turns black.
After what's been done
Will the green come back?

I set off one day
Not knowing where I would go
But I headed for the forest
It felt safer, welcoming
The vision of Dionysos in my head was strong
If only I could find his grove,
Feel his intoxication with life and death,
Succumb to his madness,
Be nourished by the vine.

Dionysos, the mad god
Dionysos, the vital god
Dionysos, the wood god
Dionysos, the shapeshifter
Dionysos, whom death cannot hold
Dionysos, beyond logic, the exploder of reason
Dionysos, the passionate and the imaginary
Dionysos, the intoxicator of all in a world of green and fruitful life.

The beings of the wild places and the spirits of animality are drawn together
As one.

Life wants only to live
It is in love with more of itself
It is in love with creation
From the nothing comes something
From the dirt comes beauty
From death comes life.

And if life can come from nothing, or from death, then what chance do the manipulators have, the kings and their slaves who go about their sterilizing business only to imagine that they enrich themselves? A poverty of imagination.

The only riches are living riches and they want to create a world of dead acquisitions.
Last man standing on a dead planet is no great achievement.
What is a safe full of dead things next to a world of living interconnections?
What is gold stamped with the head of a tyrant next to a heaving forest of intoxicated life?
What is the reason of people who can only count next to the mad intoxication with life that Dionysos brings?

Fecund communion or sterility is your choice.
Would you have green shoots of life everywhere...
Or ashes?
Would you see the world torn apart by the selfish actions of cold-hearted killers...
Or would you join in the festival of life in the grove of Dionysos?
Would you swim in lakes of wine, milk and honey that flow up naturally from the earth...
Or mourn the disappearance of the lakes and rivers,

the poisoning of your water,
the death of the seas?

The nothingness provides abundantly, all by itself, attracted to life
But the king hoards unjustly and decrees that you shall have nothing.

A pox on this earth.

A pox on this green.

A pox on this life.

May all be acquired and that which is not smited and damned.

If the king shall not have it then you shall not either.

"Lay waste! Destroy it all," roars the king in his anger.

"If I cannot have it then neither can they."

And his minions, loosed upon the earth, set about acquiring and controlling what they can
and destroying the rest.

The green turns red.

The red turns black.

After what's been done

Will the green come back?

Somewhere in the forest

There is a shaded path through the tall trees

As you walk along it you may meet Hekate, goddess of the crossroads and sorcery,

Or Pan, hoofed god of the wild places, who seductively plays his lecherous music.

There too you may espy Artemis, goddess of moon and hunt.

But should you see her do not stare lest she rend you limb from limb for she is chaste.

Continuing on the way, should you persevere and not offend these wild deities,

You may find your way to the grove of Dionysos and be invited to join his revelry.

But beware!

You will need to abandon all that you have ever known and valued here in the grove.

The intoxication will be complete.

The madness will be all-consuming.

You will forget your world of money and things.

You will forget the sterile horrors of civilisation and the values of the moralistic.

They have no meaning here amongst the green

And are ANATHEMA.

Here there is only life, death and intoxication,

Madness, pleasure and imagination,

Communion, joy, attraction.

Abandon your lives of technological sterility!

Abandon your ways of death and poisoning!

Abandon your meaningless acquisition!

Abandon your logic of numbers!

Would you become intoxicated with life?

Would you be filled with its madness?

Would you be nourished by the vine

And become one with the non-partisan Way?

Life just wants more of itself, is not concerned with this and that. To create life and love is everything.

The one, the All, working together in acts of love that create the green.

But when human beings get ideas and imagine themselves kings then they set themselves against life.

The green exists for itself, because it can, and not as resources for others. It wanders on its way.

Those who have agendas have forsaken life, forgotten the intoxication and the madness,
And submitted to the reason of sterility and abandonment of life.

Only nihilism awaits, a nihilism which only annihilates, a nihilism which only destroys and which has no imagination for life but only endless nothing without transformation.

The green turns red.

The red turns black.

After what's been done

Will the green come back?

To re-enchant the world,

For this did Dionysos come, for this he raves in his grove,

For this did Hekate, Pan and Artemis appear in the forest as wild, imaginative sprites.

The wild is alive,

The feral gather,

The outlaw stirs,

The heretics rub their hands together.

The technocrat, the capitalist and the architects of sterilization will gather to work their infernal plan upon life.

They will rouse their adepts to frothing fury through their channels of lies.

They will send out their minions to rip deep wounds into the heart of the earth, dealing death where they can.

They will broadcast gibberish and nonsense in order to confuse and infest the many with their deceptions.

Many will be beguiled.

Even more will be rendered paralysed by the shock and awe tactics.

Only those infused with love of life will stand,

Those who know that reality goes beyond life and death,

Those who know that, if life comes from nothing, then it cannot be killed for it simply finds a way to return.

Yet without you - as the All reimagines itself as something else.

How foolish to imagine a world of acquisition in opposition to life, a world that could never live.

How foolish to imagine a world of exploitation, a world that only takes life.

How foolish to imagine a world of reason when life is the passion of becoming.

How foolish to imagine, oh speck of dust, that you are anything but nothing.

Yes, you can kill

But isn't life the real blessing?

To wander through the fecund forest full of life and cooperation

Is better than to glory in the piles of misery and death you have created.

With forest magic and Dionysian madness the feral outlaws make their stand
Life against the sterile
Green against the ash
Their only law is erotic love,
Their only goal is more of it
For green is love
And the sterile king and his minions know nothing of that.
Love gives birth to love
Sterility only makes sterile,
The one is willing and cooperative,
The other forced coercion, vile violation.
The loving earth is violated by the sterility cult,
The crypto-kings breathe only death wherever they go as they seek to exploit all life.

But life will not be contained.
Look between the cracks in the concrete and even there green finds a way.
The sterility cult spreads its pathogens liberally
But life fights back as that which seeks to out-imagine the cult of death.
What is dead cannot imagine
But what is alive can do no other for life is imagination.
An end to all butcher shops!
An end to imprisoned domestication!
An end to incarcerated life!
An end to false borders which are merely the imaginings of diseased minds!

To re-green the world,

To make fit and fertile.

Let this be our task: wild love!

Once upon a time a story was told about a garden.

That garden was an endless storehouse of eternal nourishment, wild and free.

The inhabitants of that garden could have enjoyed its bounty forever.

But, instead, they trespassed the order of things and destroyed the primal harmony.

This story only retells the history of our species.

Once we lived in harmony with nature. We lived from its bounty without any cares.

There was an order of things and all were equal according to it.

But, seeking to control it, we imagine to make it submit to us and proclaim our arrogant superiority over it.

Life set against life destroys the unspeakable primal harmony that sustains all.

When the delicate balance is upset, nothing can survive and only turmoil and distress can follow, extremity upon extremity, pain upon pain.

The wise must look beyond themselves to see a bigger picture.

The wise must look beyond themselves to the network of green sustaining everything.

Earth, air, fire and water, all are necessary for life.

We are part of a system we tamper with at our peril.

Life is a madness to be intoxicated with, not the accountant's spreadsheet.

Wild and free!

Intoxicated and feral!

Passionate and without care!

The reveries of Dionysos or the slaughter houses of the sterile.

The green turns red.
The red turns black.
After what's been done
Will the green come back?

The people listen
To what the bad men say,
The men who kill the green
Each and ev'ry day.

Your phone, your TV
and your friend,
Can you trust them,
On them depend?

In the forest
And in the wood
is the home of madness
The heart of good

But in the city
and in the town
Only corruption and poison
Can be found

Yet even here

Green finds a way
To grow in grime
Each and ev'ry day

Life is a gift,
It comes from nothing
but passion, attraction
And copious loving

The elements
They want to mate
They feed and
Interpenetrate

Their copulation
Is satiation,
In nature
There is no frustration

Life must be free,
The green must roam,
Ev'rywhere to find
A fertile home

Even if the earth
Turns hot-baked black

The green, it wants

To still come back

And so the task

It still remains

The green to prosper,

To break the chains

The green turns red.

The red turns black.

After what's been done

Will the green come back?



queer

The green *is queer*.

What is the nature of sexual nature?

What is "nature loving"?

Queernaturecultures.

In her book *The Companion Species Manifesto*, a companion piece to her "A Cyborg Manifesto" which talks quite a lot about dogs, Donna Haraway discusses the idea "naturecultures". As might be intuited simply from reading the word, it is a compound idea, one which refuses to see either "nature" or "culture" separated from the other. Haraway's quite simple point, at least as I read it, is that nature is cultural and cultures are natural. To me this appears to be the idea that everything human beings imagine is an integration of what is beyond them with their appropriation and constitution of it *as such and such* (which, of course, is a fiction but couldn't be anything else anyway). So this idea is about the consequences of interaction and relationship and, incidentally, their unavoidability. David Bell, in his essay "Queernaturecultures" taken from the book *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, wants to apply this to queer, and to the green that is queer, as well. In doing so, he broaches the subject of using nature (which is also a culture) as an authority or arguing that it somehow provides an incontestable ground of sexual truth. (You will not be surprised to find that, actually, it doesn't.)

The linking of green nature together with queer creates one vast subject which almost certainly fits into no single academic space. You are looking at queer theory, ethical and philosophical studies, various environmental and biological sciences, etc., at the very least. Certainly both social and natural sciences find themselves implicated here. That will not be easy for academics to take for they are used to their sharp delineations of relevance and subject matter and are sensitive to "outsiders" stepping on the toes of

their subjects. But no matter. The green is queer and they will just have to deal with it, in interdisciplinary fashion, as best they can.

Bell's essay begins with a description of the activities of the "eco-porn" political organisation (which still seems to be going in 2025) "Fuck For Forest". This group was begun by two Norwegians in 2004 when they fucked on stage before an audience at an outdoor music festival in Kristiansand as the band The Cumshots played. The Norwegian authorities not being amenable to such behaviour, this original couple, who were making both sexual and ecological points by their act of public coitus, swiftly moved to Berlin thereafter to avoid the wheels of justice running over them. In their writing, found online, Fuck For Forest explicitly link sex with nature. For example:

"Our goal is to save nature, but it is also important to show the beauty of natural sex and sexuality. We believe that through a better relationship to our spiritual and sexual body, we can change the reality around us. . . . We believe that humanity's bad relationship to sexuality has a lot in common with the destroying of nature. Sexuality is a beautiful part of nature. . . . Sexuality and nature is connected. We are basically here because of sex. But open sexuality is often looked down upon as something dirty and strange. We felt sexuality was treated like nature, with disrespect. So why not use pure, open-minded sexuality to put focus on this unnatural way of treating this planet?"

Here, as Bell as commentator upon this suggests, we are talking about an "embodied politics" and "the supposed naturalness of sex" and "nature-loving through sex acts" that are set in an imagined "approving wilderness". In this wilderness sex and sexuality are not taboo and the human body, raw and on display and in interaction with other bodies in the same state, finds itself at home. Free, unjudged and unjudgeable sex is here set in "the

wild" as context and so that very same wild is sexualised in the same move. But it then risks becoming a sex without rules, taboos or discipline. What if, in my terms, it should become wild, intoxicated, mad sex, Dionysian sex, sex beyond any constraining reason or logic, something as apparently feral as the nature it is set in? Is this fear why prudes everywhere look down upon outdoor or public sex and portray those who partake in it as uncivilised wild animals who have forsaken the appropriate human reason and so their ethical humanity? Is the instruction to only engage in sexuality in private, behind closed doors and shuttered curtains, an attempt to separate sex from its here argued wildness in an absolute way which includes even the ability to think of it as an outdoor and so wild activity?

Fuck For Forest don't consider themselves exhibitionists. They are making what they consider to be legitimate and serious points, both about sex and nature (although how separate these ideas really are is very much the point it seems to me), and they raise money by filming the sex in nature which subscribers can pay to view. One point they make here is that this is all genuine and serious. Its not just another capitalist angle on porn to make those engaged in it rich. Fuck For Forest even try to make the point that its not really porn. Its simply lovers in nature and "porn" might be seen as a judgment on that which the organisation does not make. Instead, they claim to be both raising funds for ecological projects (some such projects have refused their money when they found out where it came from in acts of astounding prudery) and "democratising" and "naturalising" sex in the process. The suggestion is that we are "animals" and are "a part of nature" and that sex in nature is a matter of "life". To come upon naked people fucking in the woods (this has happened to me as I was fucking in some woods in Germany) they want to be seen as natural and uncontroversial rather than shocking. At the very least, Fuck for Forest seem to pose the questions "What is sex?" and "What is nature?" They also pose

the question "What do sex and nature have to do with each other?" In the queer green the answer is "Almost certainly everything".

In the last century and a half naturalists, zoologists and scientists of nature more generally have had their eyes opened somewhat (although many struggle to keep them closed so as not to see on purpose) in regard to wild sexuality - and particularly to the fact that *the more you actually look at nature, the more genuinely queer it becomes, with examples of "queer animals" popping up everywhere*. Two books Bell singles out particularly focus on this, Joan Roughgarden's *Evolution's Rainbow* (which readers of my previous work will be familiar with as its a resource I have often interacted with myself) and Bruce Bagemihl's *Biological Exuberance*, a book I shall come onto myself shortly in this section of my book. Both of these books, as well as some others, as Bell has it:

"posit... nonhuman (a.k.a. more-than-human) animal sex acts as evidence of the naturalness of homosexuality (as well as other nonreproductive sexual and gender practices, including transvestism and transgender). Nonhuman animal homosexuality is thus naturalized through the figure of the "queer animal", while homophobia is denaturalized as a culturally specific human response since animals do not exhibit hostility toward same-sex acts in their presence."

Nature, that is, in and from its wildness, quite normally and regularly gives birth to queer (homosexual, "cross-dressing", intersex, gender-crossing) animals without any suggestion or judgment that anything has "gone wrong" or is awry in the process and in direct contradiction to human pronouncements about "nature", even scientifically understood. Nature, we may then assume, is quite literally queer.

It is here, however, that "What is natural?" - or that there even is a "natural" in a meaningful way to begin with - makes a comeback as a conceptual tool. (Haraway's "naturecultures" become very relevant here.) Is "a sexuality" an essential feature of natural organisms? What is the status of sexual practice or practices vis-a-vis individual organisms as natural? Are such organisms implanted or imprinted with static sexualities from birth, programming against which they cannot fight, or is something else the case? Is "a sexuality" even ever a static thing or is it something more dynamic and flexible, even "polymorphous"? Is "sexuality" the same from organism to organism or can each example of an organism have its own kind of sexuality with its own dynamic range? Is sexuality essential or acquired - or some mixture of the two which suggests sexuality is educable or suggestible? Is there a "truth of human sexuality"? Are homosexual sexual acts - acts still to this day often thought illegitimate because "unnatural" - somehow "made legitimate" if they can be essentialised or renaturalised into things? What is the relationship of sexuality to embodied morphology? These are not inconsequential questions in human terms when people exist who insist on certain answers being true - either for themselves in particular or everyone in general. In the human world we have rights that are formulated based on sex (and the also implicated gender). So what people think about this matters and it matters whether people think of sexual interactions as "natural" or not - even if the very idea of that turns out to be somewhat confused in the light of Haraway's naturecultural ruminations.

This is not a left/right political issue for, as Bell shows, those on the left can "appeal to nature" as authority just as much as those on the right can. In fact, in these terms, it simply becomes a back and forth argument about "what is natural" as if something being endowed with the mystical quality "natural" was the deciding and authoritative factor here. Anything "natural", in this argument, is legitimate and anything "unnatural" is not.

But this becomes more complicated if all natures are cultural and all cultures are natural. Sometimes, of course, apparently natural (which of course means rhetorical, fictional) categories are brought to bear in order to do argumentative work. One such is "reproduction" with the argument made that sex IS FOR reproduction and, therefore, only reproductive sex is "natural" and so worthy of being esteemed as legitimate. We can see clearly in this argument how "the nature of sex" becomes a factor in the subject overall for, if this were true, it would seemingly cut some ice. So we have to ask this "nature of sex" question (even if, post-Haraway, we also have to accept that there will be no "nature of sex" that isn't simultaneously a cultural thing).

We see this more clearly when Bell takes a brief tour through the history of sexuality studies (in humans or animals, it doesn't really matter) where we find that science has actively resisted the notion that nature is queer. Homosexuality in non-human animals, as in their human counterparts, is explained away in as many ingeniously deliberate ways as it can be just so long as the conclusion can be avoided that nature is queer. Often this is on the basis of Darwinian evolutionary theory which harps on a lot about "sexual selection" and is based on the idea of reproduction as a matter of species survival and development. It is not too difficult to see that if your theory of survival is based on evolutionary development of sexual beings then examples of that species which either can't procreate in their couplings or have no wish to would seem to be superfluous to said evolutionary purpose. Bell suggests that such a theory makes heterosexual sex natural and the means of survival whereas queer sex is apparently useless and unnatural (unless it can somehow be smuggled, however poorly, into the reproductive purpose of sex). The obvious point to make here, however, in the light of what has already been said, is that this is a cultural project interacting with nature, one which tries to define a "good nature" and a "bad nature" that nature itself does not know of. Here we can talk about "the

domestication of non-human animals" and "the culturalisation of humans" as aspects of such endeavours, endeavours which seemingly attempt to tell nature what it is and what it isn't, and what is, or is not, natural or permissible within it. Is that a legitimate task? If it is, it will only be so within some culture motivated by its own ideology, values and beliefs. In short, it will be an imaginative project of its own, an appropriation or domestication of nature, rather than a reflection of it. We are back with the notion that no one "gets reality right". All interactions with it are contingent - as Bruce Bagemihl shows in his book which steps away, at points, from Western science and engages indigenous cosmologies and interactions with the natural world at some length which yield very, very different results and ones much more queer in content and emphasis. In arguing over "how sex is", different cultures of the world have come up with wildly varying answers. Are any "the truth of sex"?

Queer theory, as a body of ethics, values and ideas, has no truck with the essentialist argument itself. A queer theorist would not argue that "Sexuality X is natural (and so normal) because it is an inherent, essential characteristic of an organism". This, ironically, would put said theorist at odds with some queers who "explain" their queerness by recourse to exactly such an essentialist argument. Sometimes in comments I have posted on social media I have had one or two gay people angrily remonstrating with me if I have said that gayness (I would say the same of transness) is not an inherent biological characteristic of a human being (or, in fact, of anything else). I myself tend towards more social (although not entirely social) answers. These people seem to find an all-consuming value in the idea that they are gay (or trans) simply because they were born gay (or trans) where "gay" (or "trans") is a built-in biological feature they can do nothing about in the same way as they can do nothing about the chromosomes they received either. Essentially, they are saying they are gay and/or trans robots who cannot defeat their

genetic pre-programming much like most others are heterosexual and cis robots in exactly the same "locked in" situation.

People like me, however, see all this as a fiction - even if some see it as a necessary fiction - and there are obviously people in the world who do not like to be told that they are believing a useful story - because they don't like the idea that what they are believing is a "story" in the first place. Instead, they want to believe that other most useful of stories that the story they believe in is real, material, part of the fabric of matter itself. But this is not queer. This is simply an appeal to nature as authority. It is what Alan Moore has called "Nazi science" in that all eugenicists anywhere ever have thought that people just were things essentially and so that, therefore, what we need to do is eradicate the ones we don't like and keep the ones we do. When you make people into a thing, in their very fabric, you condemn them to a fate (nature) complete with a past and a future and a set of its meanings and values. This is nature as a determinative script. But is that something we should want to do? Should we want to naturalise and essentialise sexuality and gender into things? Or is the queer thing to do in the context of a wild, feral nature of experience something else entirely, something more "natureculture" as Donna Haraway puts it?

Bell doesn't answer this question but goes on to discuss naturists and naturism - better known as simply nudism. Here in his sights are those nudists who want to sharply distinguish nudism from sex - which is far from all of them but is certainly some of them. Such people essentially want to make nudists safe from the charge of simply being sex-obsessed as if naked bodies are automatically sexually-coded and sexually active and contextualised. Here the nudity might be contextualised by "health" or "wholeness" or some kind of psychological freedom supposedly attained by the lack of clothes but it is simultaneously hard not to argue that, at the same time, some kind of morality is

insidiously trying to avoid the nudity being linked with those dirty sex people who have given themselves over to immoral cravings. So you get the phenomenon of "family" nudist camps where sex is banned but nudity is not and those who cannot resist the pleasures of the flesh are quietly, or not so quietly, asked to leave. In such places single men, imagined to be sexually predatory as a class, might be refused entry or membership as a matter of routine. Bell here makes the point that in such reasoning nudity is naturalised but the desire to sexualise it is made cultural. Where such nudity is family oriented it may make gay and trans nudity cultural activities as well (these sometimes being thought, by a certain constituency, as "sex-obsessed" orientations in themselves anyway). "Naked naturalness" becomes a cis heterosexual (and chaste) pursuit.

But things aren't this simple for many people, even those you might imagine were otherwise quite liberal in their social views, find even simple nudity completely objectionable. So whilst some imagine their non-sexualised nudity is displaying some kind of natural authenticity, others would quite routinely think them perverse and corrupting. Bell regards nudism of this kind as being "paradoxical" precisely because it makes the claim that there can be such a thing as "banal nudity" in a context in which the normalisation of clothes in society has made the lack of them, all by itself, something that has become denaturalised. We see this, for example, when numerous countries outlaw being nude, or exposing certain body parts, in public. Western society in particular (taking it rhetorically as a whole) has closed off many spaces to public nudity and even more to sexualised nudity. In doing so, it valorises the body, whether sexualised or not, as taboo, forbidden, which, of course, generates its own magnetic attractions as a consequence.

All this begs several questions. It begs the question, for example, of the sexuality of the body and its relation, which it surely has, to the erotic. I wonder if wild nature, of which

humans are a part, is not, in all its embodied viscosity, engaged in erotic entanglement simply by existing? If nature is erotic, as at least some imagine it to be in its constantly transformative physical interaction and relationship, then how can bodies not be? Can we not at least suggest that the naked body is a boundary crossing phenomenon, one that risks entering into the wild green nature from which the clothed recuse themselves? If nudity is "natural" then why is sexual nudity not? And if natural is good and allowable then is this in all cases or only some? (Why is nudity more "natural" than public masturbation, for example?) In this way, it is very easy to denaturalise sexual nudity by playing up a healthy version of nudity which is a disguised puritanism which actually cuts off nudity and public sexuality from the wild it came from. Notably such "safe nudity" has to be intensively policed and manufactured and that is perhaps telling its own story, a story of the civilisation of natural madness by civilised reason.

For Bell these three examples of political eco-sex, queer animals and nudism all come down to Haraway's naturecultural suggestion. "Nature itself is not natural: nature is cultural". Or, to put it another way, when you naturalise something, or want to naturalise or denaturalise something, THAT IS A CULTURAL MOVE. Haraway's way out of this is simply to talk of naturecultures, to say that natures and cultures are entwined (and obviously in implicitly multiple ways). Natures beget cultures beget natures beget cultures. As a result, "nature" is no longer an authority any more than a culture is. As a consequence of this, perhaps we need to stop playing authoritarian games about what counts as final authority in a game of "who is in charge?" and start thinking about naturecultures as spaces for queer desires to find liberation. If the green is queer then it is not about binding it or restricting its growth or putting it in a tightly defined area but about liberating it. It is not about the reasons and logics of "how to behave", the logistics

of control, but about the mad intoxication of (and with) desire. It is surely also about the fact that nature is public, wild and free.

A second essay in *Queer Ecologies* is Stacy Alaimo's entitled "Eluding Capture: The Science, Culture, and Pleasure of 'Queer Animals'" and in it she wants to pursue better ways of "engaging with materiality" than she imagines has been the case heretofore. In some ways this essay is like Bell's in that it certainly engages nature and culture as ideas (perhaps here queer is culture and nature is, well, nature) and poses the question of how the then seemingly contradictory "queer green places" can come to be. In this, the essay once more relies on the books of Roughgarden and Bagemihl as catalogues of theory and practice as well as their copious examples of the queer in nature as it actually exists. Both of those books have the word "diversity" in their subtitles and it is their aim to set out to show that diversity is precisely the important fact of nature itself, an engine of its operation as what it is. This is all part of an agenda which sets out to correct the false picture of natural reality which has been imposed upon nature by modern Western science, a discourse with its own naturecultural historical reasons for existing as it does in the first place. Here we are reminded that science is not simply and abstractly "getting things right" but is a historically and culturally conditioned discourse which finds what that situation needs to find and finds it satisfying in doing so as a consequence of this. This is, in fact, an example of nature begetting culture begetting nature begetting culture, etc.

That it has found some things and not others, and even that it has resisted finding some things and not others, is a further consequence of this. Reasons and logics and theories find what they are able to find and are resistant to things which fall outside of their imagined understanding. As a result, Alaimo can talk about "the pernicious and persistent

articulation of homosexuality with what is unnatural" in mainstream Western scientific discourse going back at least two centuries and of the books of Bagemihl and Roughgarden, with their focus on diversity, "making sexual diversity part of a larger biodiversity". It turns out that it might make a difference if you, on the one hand, imagine a strict order of reproductive nature following a binary sexual scheme inherent in all creatures or if, on the other hand, you imagine "the howling wilderness of bestial perversions". (Of course, ethics and politics might well come into that as well to motivate your choices and the reasons which seem to motivate them in their turn.) You might watch a natural history film, perhaps presented by David Attenborough, which details the life cycle of some seemingly happily married pair of birds or mammals and imagine all of nature is like that but what will you do then when reading Roughgarden and Bagemihl, learning that there are literally hundreds of documented cases of gay sexual practice, and gay parents, in nature? Queer animals, gay, "cross-dressing", intersex and even cross-gender, are a multi-various and polymorphous fact of life: they are natural reality. That is what must be accounted for and experienced, not the chaste fantasy of the Western scientific tradition. Or, as Alaimo puts this:

"we need to embrace the possibilities for the sexual diversity of animal behavior to help us continue to transform our most basic sense of what nature and culture mean."

Here an important point, as I hinted at when discussing the previous essay of David Bell, is that, whatever the nature of the case, queer animals are NOT "a moral model or embodiment of some static universal law". They are just what can happen, happening. Nothing follows from nature. Nature offers no judgment of right or wrong, legitimate or illegitimate, and it is not telling you what to do or to be. It is not an arbitrating authority. What it is, as I will come to in due course, is an "exuberance", a diversity, "a proliferation of

astonishing differences that make nonsense of biological reductionism." Nature, we might say, is anti-fascist inasmuch as it abhors a monoculture. If you want to talk about "laws of nature" (and I concede that I mostly don't) then one would be that nature holds no prejudice against the different and the diverse. When everything is the same then one effective enemy can kill every example of it. But when things are diverse that is a naturally in-built and developed means of survival of at least some of the life of the species (a point I myself got from reading Roughgarden's book). What's more, if we add in Haraway's idea of naturecultures to this mix, as Alaimo explicitly does, then life becomes not simply a matter of species as "genetically driven machines" but of "creatures (as) embedded within and creating other 'worlds' or naturecultures". Life doesn't happen in the abstract according to rules. It is a participating in the creation, maintenance and development of it. It is the possibility for the new and the different, the developed and the diversified.

The imagined (and often posited) nature/culture divide makes a comeback in Alaimo's essay too. It is in familiar guise when scientists and other commentators can imagine that sex in nature is for reproduction (animals not being thought to have discovered sex for pleasure) but that humans (who are categorically separate from the rest of nature in this thinking) have discovered (or perhaps invented) sex as a cultural activity. This assertion seems to assume that human beings are the only beings that have invented culture and so that, presumably, the animals we look down upon simply engage in biologically-coded impulses, having sex to reproduce because they have no choice in the matter. The problem with this dogmatic idea is that the hundreds of documented cases of same-sex sexual activity in hundreds of different kinds of animal seem to completely give the lie to it. Doing so, it seems to drag humans back into the wild that such thinking had attempted to extricate us from by making us unique in our ability to be cultural. And so "humans and

animals" take their place as discursive entities in a story about natural reality in which that "reality" is often meant to be determinative and authoritative in a way I have already suggested it isn't and can't be. People surely don't suggest that "animal sex" is purely "reproductive" for nothing nor act as if human beings were creatures entirely different in kind to all the rest in order not to make a point. But if, as it turns out, the scientific gaze had been modulated by a rather moralistic kind of eyesight, one which saw good honest "natural" reproduction but managed to miss all the non-reproductive and "cultural" sex for pleasure and as play, then it may be that the story being told was for other reasons than describing what was actually going on in nature at all in the first place.

Alaimo and Bell together, then, make similar points here about the uses and abuses of a nature/culture kind of argument and the purposes to which it is put. That which is "natural" can be argued to be more foundational and materialist in regard to putative reality and that argued more cultural becomes more dubious and voluntaristic as a consequence. Such a divide accords with a similar animal/human divide too (where both these divides are, of course, simply discursive). The result has been an often heteronormative conception of nature and what Alaimo regards, in the language of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, as a "closeting" of queer animals. This, in turn, accords with Sedgwick's observation in *The Epistemology of the Closet* that:

"These ignorances, far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth."

This is to say that human beings, discursively separated from nature, do not tell nature what it is (as if they could) but they might very well be telling themselves what they have become and how they imagine to imagine themselves in a categorised and reasoned out

world made sane for humanity. This, as Alaimo remarks, has often seemed to involve creating animal/human oppositions and reducing animal sexuality to some form of deterministic impulse. But not always. This is fortunate when Alaimo observes that a deterministic nature is often regarded simply as a resource to be acquired and exploited by brute cultural forces. Things thought not to be playing a part in their existence can more easily simply be regarded as things which are "just there" and the human exploitation of this planet has ample evidence for that. This, however, is in contradiction of the actual evidence for life in the green wild itself where plants and animals actively cooperate and interact to common benefit in myriad ways not merely sexual. It is a very moot point how much, if any, of this is in any way "deterministic" for it would seem, on closer inspection, that life itself, as a property or characteristic, is "self-organising" or "participatory". As Alaimo then argues:

"In terms of environmental ethics and politics, it is crucial to acknowledge animals as cultural beings, enmeshed in social organizations, acting, interacting, and communicating. An understanding of animal cultures critiques the ideology of nature as resource, blank slate for cultural inscription, or brute, mechanistic force."

Humans, as we know from the inside out, are not biological machines without feelings and these feelings both contextualise and articulate how and for what reasons the human being does things and becomes what they are. But, that being the case, why should we imagine all other animals *are* biological machines without feelings? Why, in fact, should we even imagine plants are? Could these other forms of life not have their own versions of cultures, their own forms of pleasure, their own kinds of desire? Do not multiple forms of life engage in learned behaviours? What motivates forms of life to be and act as they do? Might not pleasure and desire be two possible options? What does a tree or a bonobo

or an elephant want? Alaimo, in telling us that "the pursuit of sexual pleasure is one of the most quintessentially 'cultural' sorts of activities", uses the work of Bagemihl in *Biological Exuberance* to point out that the bonobo appears to use hand signals to "initiate sexual activity and negotiate various body positions" in sex which may be with partners of the same or the opposite sex. There is also an account here of a macaque that can apparently fashion a form of dildo for itself. Why would a macaque want to do that? What is clear is that such discoveries of desires satisfied and pleasures sought once more makes messy the nature/culture divides some want to maintain. Haraway's naturecultures seem once more readily apparent and provide a better explanation of what is going on on the ground. It is simply not possible to maintain a hard and fast nature/culture, animal/human divide. What it seems to be more a matter of, in fact, is sociability and sociality, things which involve, in plants and animals generally, things such as desire, effort, playfulness, pleasure and sex. Consequently, as Alaimo says of "queer animals":

"Queer animals may... foster an ontology in which pleasure and eroticism are neither the result of genetically determined biological drives nor tools in cultural machinations, but are creative forces simultaneously emergent within and affecting a multitude of naturecultures. Pleasure, in this sense, may be understood within Karen Barad's notion of performativity as 'materialist, naturalist, and posthumanist,' 'that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming, its ongoing 'intra-activity'."

This does not seem remotely controversial to me if one accepts the premise that life itself, in any example of it, is self-organising and, in general terms, finds activity in the social realm generally beneficial in ways that extend beyond simply itself - as of necessity. Life, whatever it is, is NOT a machine but develops its own ways, habits and naturecultures by which it may participate in its own development in tandem with both an

environment and with other forms of life (necessarily even beyond its own species). It would seem rather dogmatic to suggest, in this discursive context, that desire and pleasure play no part in this except for one singular species. What's more, we may be minded to ask, in evolutionary frame of mind, how anything could ever evolve if it were forced by static "laws of nature", a nature that accords with some imagined "reason", to obey said laws, being under obligation to them. It would in fact seem more sensible to imagine that *transgression* were then in fact the way things evolve, that breaking boundaries constantly in an expression of wild, feral madness was how one developed beyond habits and norms and so created a new, "more successful" form of existence. Could we imagine a world in which life follows its pleasures and desires and, in so doing, prospers itself? I mean this not merely or even as individuals - but as communities, as species, and as a body of life as a whole. Imagine a planet full of life that runs on the basis of the pleasure and desire that can be created by the interactions and relations of myriad forms of life together. Thought of as a system of relationships, this does not seem far-fetched at all. What does seem far-fetched is that each example of life is acting only for and by itself in which everything else is either merely superfluous or simply resources to be exploited in a cold, hard, uninvolved way. More is going on here than "selfish genes" according to a biologist's logic of selfishness. However:

"A universe of differing naturecultures, propelled by the pursuit of pleasure as well as other forces, can hardly serve as a foundation for biological reductionism, gender essentialism, heteronormativity, or models of human exceptionalism. The multitude of utterly different models of courtship, sexual activity, childrearing arrangements, gender, transsexualism, and transvestism that Bagemihl and Roughgarden document portray animal lifeworlds that cannot be understood in reductionist ways. Myra J. Hird argues that biology 'provides a

wealth of evidence to confound static notions of sexual difference'. Her exuberant essay encourages us to imagine 'The Joy of Sex for plants, fungi, and bacteria'."

And this is what I think we should do in a world of the queer green that gives the impression of being an erotic, interactive sociality. Contrary to our attempts at method, animals are not merely different, less developed, versions of us. Animal naturecultures, plant naturecultures, will quite naturally be their own exactly as they should be. We may get a better understanding here of this idea by paying some attention to the seeming illogic of the imagined "quantum realm" in Physics which underlies all the predictability of things when considered in the macro realm of "normal science". So why should the queer green not be that which escapes our logic in its apparent self-directed madness as the substrate of the apparently ordered natural world? There are no straight lines in nature but that does not stop nature existing in ways more amazing than anything straight a human being could ever build. And so:

"Despite the scientific aim to make sense of the world, to categorize, to map, to find causal relations, many who write about sexual diversity in nonhuman animals are struck with the sense that the remarkable variance regarding sex, gender, reproduction, and childrearing among animals defies our modes of categorization, even explodes our sense of being able to make sense of it all. These epiphanic moments of wonder ignite an epistemological-ethical sense in which, suddenly, the world is not only more queer than one could have imagined, but more surprisingly itself, meaning that it confounds our categories and systems of understanding. In other words, queer animals elude perfect modes of capture..."

By eluding perfect modes of capture, queer animals dramatize emergent worlds of desire, action, agency, and interactivity that can never be reduced to a background or resource

against which the human defines himself. Haraway, defining her term 'companion species,' explains: 'There are no pre-constituted subjects and objects, and no single sources, unitary actors, or final ends. . . . A bestiary of agencies, kinds of relatings, and scores of time trump the imaginings of even the most baroque cosmologists'. Such responses emanate from a queer, green, place, in which pleasure, desire, and the proliferation of differing lifeworlds and interactions provoke intense, ethical, reactions."

What I describe as "transgression" (as is my way), Bruce Bagemihl describes as "exuberance" in his book *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*, a book both Alaimo and Bell rely on for their essays. Bagemihl says of this idea, in summary form, that:

"The essence of Biological Exuberance is that natural systems are driven as much by abundance and excess as they are by limitation and practicality. Seen in this light, homosexuality and nonreproductive heterosexuality are 'expected' occurrences—they are one manifestation of an overall 'extravagance' of biological systems that has many other expressions."

A first point to note here is that Bagemihl is talking about a system. Nature IS A WHOLE. Within that whole, however, he imagines both a vast AND AN EXPECTED diversity. "Exuberance" or, in my terms, "transgression" (of a more common "norm") are necessary features of the system rather than aberrations of, and deviations from, it. This then makes it much harder to speak of something in wild nature as "an anomaly" for who knows what greater systemic and inter-relational purpose it may serve simply in its existence? This makes the nature of the whole itself transformational or metamorphic. The ability to change or to be different, and to accommodate these things, is, systemically, a necessary

and required one. Dionysos the shapeshifter will fit in here perfectly (and not only because, in his argument, Bagemihl diverges from Western science to ask what we can learn from indigenous wisdom around the world such as in the historical North American naturecultures where the Two Spirit, the Shape-Shifter and the Trickster-Transformer are evidenced entities). Indeed, it is in the detailed interpretation of indigenous accounts (from people who actually lived, or still live, in wild nature, cheek by jowl with the life there in ways modern Western researchers can only dream of) that Bagemihl teases out a nature far more wild, sexual, queer and diverse than often puritanical and binary Westerners have wanted to entertain. Such non-Western worlds can easily become places of admixture and transformation, of kaleidoscopic diversity, and are rich in crossover between imaginative elements and observations of genuine natural phenomena. What stands out to me especially, reading Bagemihl's extravagant accounts, is that these indigenous people seem much more integrated into the wild green than we moderns who are often mostly alienated from it. And yet we are the ones who claim to "understand" it when many of us barely even experience it. This arrogance, in fact, exactly mirrors a contrast I set up earlier when discussing the green where we travel from the incarcerating civilised realm of "knowledge" and "understanding" to embrace instead the "experience" and "madness" and "intoxication" of the Dionysian revelry. What is needed is not so much an instrumental knowledge which imagines to have the power of reasoned control as an intimate, personal and overwhelming experience of the socially diverse, erotic sexuality of wild reality. Or so I claim.

In terms of his own argument for "biological exuberance", which relies heavily on naturecultural observation of non-Western kinds, Bagemihl says:

"It is striking that in so many cultures that recognize some kind of alternate gender/sexuality system in animals, human homosexuality/transgender are also routinely recognized and even honored. Perhaps, then, what is most valuable about indigenous views of animal homosexuality/transgender is not so much the 'accuracy' of beliefs about this species or that, but the overall worldview imparted by these cultures: a view of both animals and people in which sexuality and gender are each realms of multiple possibilities.

In fact, ideas about human and animal homosexuality tend to be mutually reinforcing. When people consider homosexuality/transgender to be an accepted part of human reality, they are not surprised to find gender and sexual variability in animals as well. Similarly, a culture living in intimate association with the natural world will undoubtedly encounter animal homosexuality/transgender on a routine basis; these observations in turn contribute to the culture's view of such things as an integral part of human life. On the other hand, people accustomed to seeing homosexuality/transgender as an aberration will balk at encountering the phenomena in animals. And when a culture no longer lives in close association with wilderness, it will have less opportunity to encounter natural examples of variation in gender and sexual expression."

What Bagemihl then appears to be saying to me is that we need to return to nature, to a world of less arbitrary relationships, if we want to truly experience its queer realities and become informed by that experience. Perhaps that is why so many of us have become estranged from it as we were herded into the set, centrally-controlled lives we now lead?

The green is wild

The green is queer

But how would you know

If you never come near?

The green is wild

The green is free

Civilised prisons

Are for me and thee

The green turns red.

The red turns black.

After what's been done

Will the green come back?

Let us approach all this scientifically with Bagemihl:

"One of the more important insights to emerge from chaos theory is that the natural world often behaves in seemingly inexplicable or 'counterproductive' ways as part of its 'normal' functioning. According to Sally Goerner (in her discussion of chaos, evolution, and deep ecology), 'Time and again, nonlinear models show that apparently aberrant, illogical behavior is, in fact, a completely lawful part of the system.' Similarly, biologist Donald Worster remarks that 'scientists are beginning to focus on what they had long managed to avoid seeing. The world is more complex than we ever imagined ... and indeed, some would add, ever can imagine.' More than half a century earlier, evolutionary biologist J. B. S. Haldane presaged these thoughts when he commented that 'the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, it is queerer than we can suppose'—words we used to open this book. Although none of these scientists is referring specifically to homosexuality, the alternate systems of gender and sexuality found throughout the animal kingdom are

exactly the sort of 'discontinuities' and 'irrational' events that should be generated in a 'chaotic' system.

Particularly relevant in this respect is Goerner's statement of one of five basic 'principles' of chaos: 'Nonlinear systems may exhibit qualitative transformations of behavior (bifurcations). The idea is simple: a single system may exhibit many different forms of behavior—all the result of the same basic dynamic. One equation, many faces. A corollary to this idea is that a system may have ... multiple competing forms of behavior, each perhaps a hairsbreadth away, each representing stable mutual-effect organization.' Transposed to the realm of sexuality, this idea offers the potential for intriguing insights: heterosexuality, homosexuality, and all variants in between can be seen as alternative manifestations of a single sexual 'dynamic,' as it were, which is itself part of a much larger nonlinear system. The 'flux' of this system is played out in endless and infinitely varying expressions within individual lives, through various communities, between different species, across sequences of time, and so on and so forth."

Bagemihl's conclusion here should then be obvious: "deviation from the norm is part of the norm." But the seeming trick here is to understand how a system - something operating at the macro level - is reliant on the more chaotic diversity that constitutes it (a very Hermetic or alchemical thing to want to do). Here Bagemihl wants to integrate the Gaia theory of James Lovelock and others (which, in summary form, posits that "the sum of all living and non-living matter forms a single self-regulating entity, analogous to a giant living organism") and the reality of a biodiversity which includes sexual diversity (where "biodiversity" is regarded as "the principle that the vitality of a biological system is a direct consequence of the diversity it contains: as diversity increases, so does stability and resilience"). This is saying that not only is nature queer but being queer makes it more

stable and more resilient, more of a dynamic system of relationships. What Bagemihl zeroes in on is then exactly that quality of diversity which, since it exists, must be doing something. Earlier Bagemihl had remarked that "The existence of a natural phenomenon is its function" and I regard this as being the case in regard to diversity specifically. Plasticity and diversity of behaviour and morphology Bagemihl remarks again and again to be an aspect of evolutionary advantage. The ability to "not play by the rules" is as important as the ability to follow them. Consequently:

"Behavioral versatility is best regarded as a manifestation of the larger 'chaotic ordering' or nonlinearity of the world, rather than merely a response to it. A broader synergy is involved, a pattern of overall adaptability that can be realized in ways that do not necessarily entail any literal 'contribution' to reproduction or any straightforward 'improvement' in an animal's well-being. In other words, it is the presence of behavioral flexibility in a system that is as valuable, if not more so, than its actual concrete 'usefulness' or 'functionality.'

Taken together, these observations—of sexual diversity, and the strength imparted by such sexual variability—lead to an important conclusion. The concept of biodiversity should be extended to include not only the genetic variety, but also the systems of social organization found within a species or ecosystem. In other words, sexual and gender systems are an essential measure of biological vitality. The more diverse patterns of social/sexual organization that a species or biological system contains—including homosexuality, transgender, and nonreproductive heterosexuality—the stronger that system will be. Mating and courtship patterns are, after all, as much a part of the 'complexity' of an ecosystem as the number of species it contains—and same-sex activity is an integral part of those mating and courtship systems in many animals. It stands to reason, then, that a rich mosaic of different social patterns should increase the vitality of a system, even when such

patterns themselves are apparently 'unproductive' or are found in only a fraction of the population.

In a rain forest that contains many hundreds of thousands of species of mammals, birds, insects, plants, and so on, the 'purpose' of yet one more kind of beetle may be difficult to see—except when understood in terms of its contribution to the overall complexity and vitality of the environment. Similarly, the 'function' of a particular social or sexual behavior such as homosexual courtship or heterosexual reverse mounting may seem minimal or even nonexistent at the level of a particular species or individual. But its contribution to the overall strength of the system is independent of such 'utility' (or lack thereof) and is also independent of the proportion of the population that participates in it. Every individual, every behavior—whether productive or 'counterproductive,' comprising 1 percent or 99 percent of the population—has a part to play. Its role is not in the tapestry of life, but as the tapestry of life: its existence is its 'function.' Biological diversity is intrinsically valuable, and homosexuality/transgender is one reflection of that diversity."

This leads Bagemihl to argue, following Georges Bataille, that "exuberance is the source and essence of life, from which all other patterns flow" based on an analysis of the whole as a matter of energy use and consumption. Life (if in fact not simply everything) is all about energy. That large hot ball of burning matter some 150 million kilometres away (roughly speaking) is why any life exists at all and its all a matter of pure energy. Every day we receive energy from it, as all the life forms on earth do too, and that energy must be used (which actually means "transformed") somehow. Bataille argued, as Bagemihl does in following his lead, that our issue is dealing with this constant and excessive source of energy in what constitutes a vast energy cycle that extends far beyond this planet. (Do

you find it so strange that the smallest thing would be tangled up with the biggest? Don't.) As Bagemihl continues:

"Virtually all outpouring of activity, both (pro)creative and destructive—the development of baroque ornament and pattern (or its distillation into concentrated minimalism), the wanton consumption of animal and plant foods (or mass starvations in their absence), the extreme elaboration of social systems (encompassing both 'complex' and 'simple' forms), the florescence of new species and the extinction of others, the cycles of burgeoning and decaying biomass—all of these can be seen, ultimately, as mechanisms that 'use up' or express this excess energy. According to this view, life should in fact be full of 'wasteful,' 'extravagant,' and 'excessive' activities... [This] exuberance is [then] the source and essence of life, from which all other patterns flow.

Most importantly, the concept of Biological Exuberance sheds new light on the phenomenon of homosexuality. If, as Bataille suggests, life is characterized by what appear to be 'wasteful' activities, then what could be more 'wasteful' than homosexuality and nonprocreative heterosexuality (and gender systems)? If sexual reproduction itself is a means of using up excess biochemical energy, then obviously sexual or social activity that does not itself lead to reproduction will be an even greater 'squandering' of such energy. Homosexuality/transgender is simply one of the many expressions of the natural intensity or 'exuberance' of biological systems. Contrary to what we have all been taught in high school, reproduction is not the ultimate 'purpose' or inevitable outcome of biology. It is simply one consequence of a much larger pattern of energy 'expenditure,' in which the overriding force is the need to use up excess. In the process, many organisms end up passing on their genes, but just as many lead lives in which reproduction figures scarcely at all. Earth's profusion simply will not be 'contained' within procreation: it wells up and spills over

and beyond this Lives of intense briefness or sustained incandescence—whether procreative or just creative—each is fueled by the generosity of existence. The equation of life turns on both prodigious fecundity and fruitless prodigality."

One of the many takeaways from Bruce Bagemihl's book is that people of indigenous nations have, over the centuries, built up insights on nature and even concerning existence itself which Western science, in its own narrow and culturally specific way, has never managed. I do not have time here to go into any of them in any detail so you will have to read *Biological Exuberance* for yourself for that. But one of these is reported of one Frank LaPena, a traditional poet and artist of the Wintu tribe of what is now called northern California, who says:

"The earth is alive and exists as a series of interconnected systems where contradictions as well as confirmations are valid expressions of wholeness."

This is compatible with ideas such as the Gaia hypothesis, Daoism or the Hermetic belief system of "As above, so below" and is not so far away from more Western notions such as quantum physics. Each imagine, in their own way and for their own reasons to be sure, a systematic view of all life together in an environment as a system of relationships. They show, taken together for a moment, that there are many ways to describe things but that no one way amounts to nature's own script. Whether we talk about cosmic power, the sun's rays or the actions of minute particles, we might actually in the end only be talking about the transformations of forms of energy within a system, a system, moreover, compelled to metamorphosis and prodigious in its own ability to diversify. As Bagemihl takes up this story:

"Ironically, one need not look into the future or on 'alien worlds' to find appropriate models: shape-shifting and morphing creatures are not merely the stuff of fantasy. The animal world—right now, here on earth—is brimming with countless gender variations and shimmering sexual possibilities: entire lizard species that consist only of females who reproduce by virgin birth and also have sex with each other; or the multigendered society of the Ruff, with four distinct categories of male birds, some of whom court and mate with one another; or female Spotted Hyenas and Bears who copulate and give birth through their 'penile' clitorides, and male Greater Rheas who possess 'vaginal' phalluses (like the females of their species) and raise young in two-father families; or the vibrant transsexualities of coral reef fish, and the dazzling intersexualities of gynandromorphs and chimeras. In their quest for 'postmodern' patterns of gender and sexuality, human beings are simply catching up with the species that have preceded us in evolving sexual and gender diversity—and the aboriginal cultures that have long recognized this."

Transformation? The transgressive and the queer? Diversity? It is all around us. IT IS US. It is the force which energises the universe and the characteristic which enables its longevity:

"Biological Exuberance simply takes our intuitive understanding of the diversity of life and makes it the essence of existence. We needn't be living in material wealth or in an isolated wilderness to experience this lavishness, either. The weeds struggling through a sidewalk crack or choking an abandoned urban plot are every bit as sumptuous as the most refined of rose gardens, the most magnificent of mountain forests—if not more so. Gifted with this heightened understanding, we can now find the intoxication contained in a glass of water, where before even the most sophisticated wine seemed flavorless (to paraphrase Hakim Bey)."

Dionysos the shapeshifter bids us "Come!"

Into this wild, transformative wilderness

We have nothing to fear

From queer

The green

Prodigious in its diversity

Utters words

Of queerly erotic entanglement and intoxication

The green turns red.

The red turns black.

After what's been done

Will the green come back?

EROTIC

Once upon a time
(So the scientists say)
There was a big bang
That lit up the first day

A great explosion
A grand orgasm
An expression of desire
An ejaculate spasm

Hot elements flung out into space
Coalesced and mingled, interlaced
Life and passion was infused
Casual combining, the constant muse

From the dark earth came abundant life
As roots sought food and friends in strife
Cooperation to secure
Luxuriant entanglings to procure

Species mixed and freely joined
In unions frequent, unalloyed
Food and succour, their desire,
Abundant life, why they conspire

Self-organising strength and growth

Intimate without an oath
Penetrating all around
In it together, tightly bound

A heaving mass of vital life
No husband, brother, sister, wife
A great entangled reproduction
Without the need for skilled seduction

Entangling with the ones you're with
Is no contemporary myth
Creation has no moral rule
But constitutes erotic school

Rule of life: implicit attraction
The need for others, not abstraction
How could we live, how could we go
Unless two "H" had loved the "O"?

Elements, compounds, new admixtures,
Alch'my of life with no set fixtures
Without a plan, it writhes together
A fecund, fertile erotic weather

Materiality it bursts
With erotic actions, hungers, thirsts,

Life: erotic to the core
Soaking in it: more, more, more!

Rolling in spunk we satiate
Taking madness for a mate
Blood and sweat and tears and piss
An earthy, filthy, erotic bliss

Sweet and juicy,
Warm and wet,
Attraction
That you can't forget

To feel the touch
Enjoy the texture
To join
In an erotic mixture

The sexual imagination
An internal stimulation
Infusing things with pleasurable meaning
Desiring a rabid gleaning

Imperatives of interaction
A universe born from attraction
Pleasure, desire, magnetise

Bums and boobs, faces, thighs

Grouping once ourselves together

In the outdoors, much not never

Frolicking with pure delight

Entering those holes, so tight

Being in good company

Propagating harmony

An erotic fellow feeling

Constantly and most appealing

All ages can enjoy the pleasure

Indulge without a rule or measure

Appetites to satiate

Appendages we must fellate

Pleasure, desire, founts of good

Bodies, feeling, could and should

Neurons firing, filled with joy

No need here for the coy

A desire to feel and to see

Unstoppable pleasurability

The thrill, implicit in interaction

Requires no embarrassment or redaction

Bodies tactile, nudity,
All laid bare for us to see
Interaction will excite
Hidden feats of erotic might

Seeking in cooperation
Desiring pleasure in causation
Welcoming your cum donation
We smile and glow at sex creation

Two is comp'ny, three's a crowd
Be consumed by madness, its allowed
There is no god, there is no law
Suck until it hurts your jaw

Sex for fun and sex for pleasure
Desiring sex that's without measure
Universe made of desire
Share the pleasure, light the fire

Let the flames never go out
Int'macy must verily shout
If we would be passing strong
And endure for very long

Especially in the last ten years, I have read many books about anarchy and anarchism and many other books, pamphlets and essays written by self-declared anarchists. Exceedingly few of them, in propagandising for their anarchy, made an appeal to love as the motive for anarchy. And yet this is what I am going to do now, not least based on the green, queer and erotic sections of this book above which summon me to do so. Yet there are many other reasons for this decision as well and I am going to mention several of them in the space available below.

I begin where my explicit entry to "anarchism" began - with the words of Emma Goldman. At the beginning of her anarchist career, in the months after her lover Alexander Berkman had been imprisoned in 1892 for the attempted murder of the businessman, Frick (a plot in which she was involved), Goldman felt moved to take up her own activism. (We may reasonably conjecture that this was not least because she felt called to live up to the example Berkman had given and for which she felt somewhat responsible.) Just over a year after the events which had led to Berkman's imprisonment, Goldman herself gave a speech in New York to starving workers which would lead to her own imprisonment as she was accused of inciting a riot by her words which included something along the lines of taking what you needed if the rich would not let you have it. There is good reason to believe the police witnesses who testified to this were making the most of it but this is not my point in bringing this incident up. The point is that, while awaiting trial for this imagined crime, Goldman took part in her first major public interview for the *New York World* newspaper (owned by Joseph Pulitzer) which would bring her to public attention as a political thinker. This was only made more the case by her interviewer being Nellie Bly, a famous journalist of the time.

The key point for my purposes here is that Bly asks Goldman about her anarchism:

"BLY: 'When did you become an Anarchist, and what made you one?'

GOLDMAN: 'Oh, I have been one all my life, but I never really entered into the work until after the Chicago riot, seven years ago.' (Goldman is referring to the Haymarket riot when police shot randomly at a crowd and a group of known anarchists were rounded up and put to death under the excuse of them being involved in a bomb plot.)

BLY: 'Why are you one? What is your object? What did you hope to gain?'

GOLDMAN: 'We are all egoists. There are some that, if asked why they are Anarchists, will say, 'for the good of the people.' It is not true, and I do not say it. I am an Anarchist because I am an egoist. It pains me to see others suffer. I cannot bear it. I never hurt a man in my life, and I don't think I could. So, because what others suffer makes me suffer, I am an Anarchist and give my life to the cause, for only through it can be ended all suffering and want and unhappiness."

Goldman reveals several things about herself in this short exchange and in it I see the kernel of what I have come to call "social egoism" in my own formulation of anarchy (which takes a lot of instruction from reading a lot about Goldman's own life and her writings). Goldman is here concerned about others because their pains become her pains. Her attitude is that if someone (or more particularly someones in general) are in pain then that is her pain too. She describes this in terms of "egoism" - then a branch of anarchist thought or a way of understanding anarchy in general. (Goldman, as myself, was a hybrid thinker in anarchist terms, she bridged or united social anarchist and egoist anarchist concerns. She can consequently be criticised from both sides by more purist thinkers for her apparent syncretism.) Goldman was also an extremely erotic person, a person of great

passion and feeling who engaged in many loves during her life even if we restrict ourselves to those we know of. Putting all this together, I imagine that Goldman had a feeling for people, both in general and in particular, that motivated a desire to see them living in a world free from suffering where a foundational situation of basic happiness was available to all. Being a realist, this took the form, in an oppressive world, of wanting to free people from their suffering. I call this feeling "love". (Goldman, not least in her first decade of activity, was also, hardly coincidentally, a strong and vociferous proponent of "free love", love which was based on common affection and not bound by what she saw as the coercions of marriage. This was particularly appealing to women who were essentially domestic prisoners under the ethos of the time. "Let there be nothing but voluntary affection" says Goldman in this same interview. Goldman had no issue even with multiple voluntary romantic encounters albeit that, according to her personal temperament, she could only entertain these serially rather than concurrently.)

This "loving", and pro-love, attitude towards people in general was not unique to Goldman amongst an anarchist constituency. We find it also in her contemporary (and sometime colleague) Errico Malatesta, an Italian social anarchist, as well. If you read Davide Turcato's Errico Malatesta reader, *The Method of Freedom*, for example, you find there Malatesta talking of himself as "by nature affectionate and impassioned" and dreaming "of an ideal world in which all would love one another and be happy" in "The Republic Of The Boys And That Of The Bearded Men". In "Program And Organization Of The International Working Men's Association" this same Malatesta asks:

"What is the point of preaching brotherhood and love of one's neighbour when the proletarian has to fight for a crust of bread and is obliged, each and every day, to compete for it with his neighbour?"

In the same piece he later writes (in the programmatic and overarching way anarchist socialists of his type did):

"In the wake of the revolution, it shall be a moral duty incumbent upon all to display love and respect for one's fellow men, to protect the weak and the children, to work, to consider the interests of society in every individual action—in short, everything that science and experience has or may demonstrate useful to men."

Yet again in this same document Malatesta writes, in relation to "homeland and humanity":

"The dividing up of humanity into such a wide variety of homelands is also a by-product of the state of strife in which the human race has been living and still does. The International, which wants all men duty bound to think of themselves as brothers and to be held together by the close bonds of moral and material solidarity and to enjoy the world in common as their shared inheritance, yearns to amalgamate all homelands into one shared homeland, the world; and to banish from men's hearts the sentiment of patriotism, this being the exclusive or at any rate preferential love for the land or the people where and into whom one was born, the claim to an entitlement in one's homeland to more rights than those born elsewhere and which boils down to indifference, rivalry, and hatred vis à vis other peoples and thus to contention and war."

In the section on "family" in this document Malatesta writes:

"With woman released from her subjection to man, which was the original root of the family; with the religious prejudices that have misrepresented the true nature of sexual

relations, now banished; with private ownership and its concomitant right of succession that currently forms the real basis of the family, done away with; with children, the protection of whom is the sole justification for the family as such, entrusted to the care of society, there is no further reason for the present family as a union legitimized by society and made more or less indissoluble, to exist. Sexual relations should be wholly free and governed solely by love and fellow-feeling. The International calls for the abolition of all bonds that currently hamper freedom in love, be these enshrined in law or merely enforced by custom and social convention, so-called."

On "instruction and education" he says:

"Education, of which instruction is the technical aspect, should derive not only from the school but from the entire social environment and should be designed above all to develop the sentiment of love and respect for people, to ensure the success of whichever habits and tastes best serve the general good and elevate the intellectual, moral, and material assets of the individual to the highest possible level."

On "crimes and punishments" he comments:

"Once society is so arranged that the freedom and well-being of one is complemented by the freedom and well-being of another, once work itself turns into an outlet for the bodily need for exercise and activity, once one is loved and respected from birth and schooled in love and respect for others, there will be no more criminality deriving from society."

As his summing up of his entire manifesto here, Malatesta writes:

"To sum up: the International is out to replace: God with SCIENCE; the State with the spontaneous organization of humanity upon the foundations of universal solidarity, which is to say, ANARCHY; the homeland with the UNITY OF THE HUMAN CONSORTIUM; private ownership with COMMUNISM; the Family with LOVE; Strife between men with the BATTLE AGAINST NATURE ON BEHALF OF THE HAPPINESS OF ALL HUMAN BEINGS. And in order to bring this ideal about, it reckons there is no option but the COMPLETE AND SIMULTANEOUS ABOLITION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY AND POLITICAL POWER, by means of REVOLUTION mounted against the Government and against the PROPRIETED."

Writing in perhaps his most famous pamphlet, *Anarchy*, Malatesta writes about the evolutionary socialisation of human beings in the following terms:

"as now evolved, man could not live apart from his fellows without falling back into a state of animalism. Through the refinement of sensibility, with the multiplication of social relationships, and through habit impressed on the species by hereditary transmission for thousands of centuries, this need of social life, this interchange of thought and of affection between man and man has become a mode of being necessary for our organism. It has been transformed into sympathy, friendship, and love, and subsists independently of the material advantages that association procures. So much is this the case, that man will often face suffering of every kind, and even death, for the satisfaction of these sentiments."

In this same pamphlet, in an argument about government's lack of necessity, Malatesta claims that we need not be motivated by its coercions, neither associations with capitalist motivations, but rather "those associations inspired by the love of humanity"... [where] "each will find his interests synonymous with the interests of every one else". In "A Bit of Theory" Malatesta says quite clearly that, "What we require is the triumph of love and

freedom" and that "It is through love of mankind that we are revolutionists". In a more summary statement in the piece "Anarchy and Violence" Malatesta comments:

"Anarchy is freedom in solidarity. It is only through the harmonizing of interests, through voluntary co-operation, through love, respect, and reciprocal tolerance, by persuasion, by example, and by the contagion of benevolence, that it can and ought to triumph."

In concluding this piece Malatesta writes that "Our doctrine is a doctrine of love". And so it goes on in this vein, here and there, for about 600 pages in this Malatesta Reader.

Malatesta's fellow Italian, the insurrectionary anarchist communist Luigi Galleani, wrote the following in his book *The End of Anarchism?* on the subject of human motives and in it he implicates love:

"As proponents of the broadest individual autonomy, we have shown that this absolute independence from any domination by either a majority or a minority, from any human oppression, cannot find a better or more vigilant security than in anarchist-communism: unlimited freedom in the satisfaction of needs; unlimited freedom in the choice of work.

Exceptional conditions of the moment or of the situation might require that we limit our inclinations as well as increase our work. In the future, as it happens at present, might we not, we who are in good health, tighten our belt a little in order to help people afflicted by an epidemic with food and medicine? Do we not, even now, if a sudden fire develops act as firemen? . . . As nurses, if an epidemic occurs? . . . As diggers in cases of flood or landslide? And doesn't this happen without command or coercion? . . . Without regard to individual inclinations or unusual risks? . . . All this is only in obedience to the voice surging from the

depth of every conscience, calling in the name of life, of preservation and solidarity with the species. And is not that voice the automatic and irresistible stimulus to the highest and noblest of our actions?

And is not that call valid? Is it not received with an outburst of love and concern such as has never greeted a commandment of god, an edict of a king, a law of parliament?"

In Peter Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, one of the most famous of anarchist writings and a place where we might (whilst being yet still uneducated about it) expect to find plenteous encouragements to love, we find, instead, the following:

"Several works of importance were published in the years 1872–1886, dealing with the intelligence and the mental life of animals... and three of them dealt more especially with the subject under consideration; namely, Les Sociétés animales, by Espinas (Paris, 1877); La Lutte pour l'existence et l'association pour la lutte, a lecture by J. L. Lanessan (April 1881); and Louis Büchner's book, Liebe und Liebes-Leben in der Thierwelt, of which the first edition appeared in 1882 or 1883, and a second, much enlarged, in 1885. But excellent though each of these works is, they leave ample room for a work in which Mutual Aid would be considered, not only as an argument in favour of a pre-human origin of moral instincts, but also as a law of Nature and a factor of evolution. Espinas devoted his main attention to such animal societies (ants, bees) as are established upon a physiological division of labour, and though his work is full of admirable hints in all possible directions, it was written at a time when the evolution of human societies could not yet be treated with the knowledge we now possess. Lanessan's lecture has more the character of a brilliantly laid-out general plan of a work, in which mutual support would be dealt with, beginning with rocks in the sea, and then passing in review the world of plants, of animals and men. As to Büchner's

work, suggestive though it is and rich in facts, I could not agree with its leading idea. The book begins with a hymn to Love, and nearly all its illustrations are intended to prove the existence of love and sympathy among animals. However, to reduce animal sociability to love and sympathy means to reduce its generality and its importance, just as human ethics based upon love and personal sympathy only have contributed to narrow the comprehension of the moral feeling as a whole. It is not love to my neighbour—whom I often do not know at all—which induces me to seize a pail of water and to rush towards his house when I see it on fire; it is a far wider, even though more vague feeling or instinct of human solidarity and sociability which moves me. So it is also with animals. It is not love, and not even sympathy (understood in its proper sense) which induces a herd of ruminants or of horses to form a ring in order to resist an attack of wolves; not love which induces wolves to form a pack for hunting; not love which induces kittens or lambs to play, or a dozen of species of young birds to spend their days together in the autumn; and it is neither love nor personal sympathy which induces many thousand fallow-deer scattered over a territory as large as France to form into a score of separate herds, all marching towards a given spot, in order to cross there a river. It is a feeling infinitely wider than love or personal sympathy—an instinct that has been slowly developed among animals and men in the course of an extremely long evolution, and which has taught animals and men alike the force they can borrow from the practice of mutual aid and support, and the joys they can find in social life.

The importance of this distinction will be easily appreciated by the student of animal psychology, and the more so by the student of human ethics. Love, sympathy and self-sacrifice certainly play an immense part in the progressive development of our moral feelings. But it is not love and not even sympathy upon which Society is based in mankind. It is the conscience—be it only at the stage of an instinct—of human solidarity. It is the

unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of every one's happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own. Upon this broad and necessary foundation the still higher moral feelings are developed."

Kropotkin here has a very strange and one might say moralistic, picky and particularistic, idea of love (Emma Goldman thought much the same of old Kropotkin and told him so to his face in his own house when he imagined that "free love" was not really a top anarchist concern - in contradiction of Goldman's own beliefs) and for the purposes of my thesis here we will need to interrogate it by basically (and eventually) asking the question: WHAT IS LOVE ANYWAY? as we go through the rest of *Mutual Aid* and beyond.

The problem there is that, in distinction to someone like his comrade Malatesta who writes about "love of humanity" all through his work (at least according to the comprehensive reader I consulted), Kropotkin does not - especially here in *Mutual Aid* which aims to argue for a more protean and biological origin for the instinct to mutual support (in distinction to mutual conflict) amongst animals in general and humans in particular. So the phrase "love of humanity", or similar, does not occur in this book and Kropotkin explains mutual aid, here as the closing of his argument and his book, in the following way:

"it is especially in the domain of ethics that the dominating importance of the mutual aid principle appears in full. That mutual aid is the real foundation of our ethical conceptions seems evident enough. But whatever the opinions as to the first origin of the mutual aid feeling or instinct may be—whether a biological or a supernatural cause is ascribed to it—

we must trace its existence as far back as to the lowest stages of the animal world; and from these stages we can follow its uninterrupted evolution, in opposition to a number of contrary agencies, through all degrees of human development, up to the present times. Even the new religions which were born from time to time—always at epochs when the mutual aid principle was falling into decay in the theocracies and despotic States of the East, or at the decline of the Roman Empire—even the new religions have only reaffirmed that same principle. They found their first supporters among the humble, in the lowest, downtrodden layers of society, where the mutual aid principle is the necessary foundation of every-day life; and the new forms of union which were introduced in the earliest Buddhist and Christian communities, in the Moravian brotherhoods and so on, took the character of a return to the best aspects of mutual aid in early tribal life.

Each time, however, that an attempt to return to this old principle was made, its fundamental idea itself was widened. From the clan it was extended to the stem, to the federation of stems, to the nation, and finally—in ideal, at least—to the whole of mankind. It was also refined at the same time. In primitive Buddhism, in primitive Christianity, in the writings of some of the Mussulman teachers, in the early movements of the Reform, and especially in the ethical and philosophical movements of the last century and of our own times, the total abandonment of the idea of revenge, or of “due reward”—of good for good and evil for evil—is affirmed more and more vigorously. The higher conception of “no revenge for wrongs,” and of freely giving more than one expects to receive from his neighbours, is proclaimed as being the real principle of morality—a principle superior to mere equivalence, equity, or justice, and more conducive to happiness. And man is appealed to to be guided in his acts, not merely by love, which is always personal, or at the best tribal, but by the perception of his oneness with each human being. In the practice of mutual aid, which we can retrace to the earliest beginnings of evolution, we thus find the positive and

undoubted origin of our ethical conceptions; and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support—not mutual struggle—has had the leading part. In its wide extension, even at the present time, we also see the best guarantee of a still loftier evolution of our race."

The key there, of course, for me is that Kropotkin, once again, makes the explicit point that this is not simply a matter of "love", a thing he imagines more personal or, at most, tribal in origin as opposed to his imagined "instinct for mutual aid" which he imagines implicit within species. I find this analysis questionable and not least because feelings, emotions, motivations and actions do not come with descriptions attached. Neither do words map, in an inherent and irrefutable way, one to one to such things. Who is to say, then, that what Kropotkin called "mutual aid" is NOT done from or with love or that these factors overlap considerably to produce the effects he observes? How can Kropotkin be so dogmatic as to absolutely rule out the presence of what is called love in the calculus of mutual aid? I think the issue here, in the final analysis, is not Kropotkin's analysis of mutual aid in his book of the same name (which, in my view, has stood the test of time) but his appraisal of love and its part in affairs which, to my eyes at least, seems narrow, somewhat dismissive and unjustifiably excluded from his considerations.

Max Stirner, meanwhile, writing *The Unique and Its Property* in the mid 1840s, thought of those who professed to "love humanity" as liberal philanthropic do gooders who brought their moralistic prejudices with them into society. In some cases, I am sure he was right. (You will certainly find several of these ultimately authoritarian "do gooders" who crack on about "benevolence" far too much in anarchist sources and I did researching this chapter.) But not in every case (as already suggested). Consequently, in an excoriating passage towards the end of his book, Stirner writes the following:

"Get away from me with your 'love of humanity'! Sneak in, you philanthropist, into the 'dens of vice;' linger sometime in the throng of the great city. Won't you everywhere find sin, and sin, and yet more sin? Won't you wail over corrupt humanity, lament about the monstrous egoism? Will you see a rich person without finding him ruthless and 'egoistic'? You may already call yourself an atheist, but you remain true to the Christian feeling that a camel will more easily go through the eye of a needle than a rich person will not be an 'inhuman monster.' How many do you see anyway that you wouldn't throw into the 'egoistic mass'? What then has your love of humanity found? Nothing but unlovable human beings! And where do they all come from? From you, from your love of humanity! You've brought the sinner in your head with you, therefore you found him, therefore you shoved him in everywhere. If you don't call people sinners, then they aren't; you alone are the creator of sinners; you, who imagine that you love people, you yourself throw them into the mire of sin, you yourself divide them into virtuous and vicious, human beings and inhuman monsters; you yourself defile them with the venom of your possessedness; because you don't love human beings, but the human being. But I tell you, you have never seen a sinner, you have only - dreamed him."

I imagine what Stirner was writing against here was a certain sort of idealistic do gooder with imaginary spooks in their head ("love of humanity") rather than of love as a concrete property that can be actualised by real people in the world. (After all, he had a love of his own, one Marie Daehnhardt to whom *The Unique and Its Property* is dedicated, even though it turned out that she, by her own admission later to John Henry Mackay, didn't really love him back.) And the game is given away here in the penultimate sentence of that I have just quoted. One imagines the love of which Goldman speaks (who also warmly received the ideas of Stirner), and perhaps that of Malatesta too, was not of an abstract "love" for an abstract "humanity" but one for real people in their real lives. In pointing out

this distinction, Stirner in fact helps us on our way for love should always be dealing with real people rather than abstract phantoms or, worse, a general principle of humanity. No such thing exists. But real people do and that is to whom love must be directed and between whom it must be actualised and realised.

Gustav Landauer was a German anarchist-socialist at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. He was of somewhat conservative personal morality (valuing the family highly and often in the face of criticism for it by others who imagined different communal arrangements) but nevertheless spoke at length to the creation of prefigurative communities of those who lived in contradistinction to the ways of capitalism and political authoritarianism. We see some of this in this extract from his essay "Through Community to Separation" which speaks in favour of such prefigurative separatism in a way very much to do with something Landauer identifies as "love":

"There is yet another way to feel the infinite, the most splendid of them all. We are all familiar with it as long as we are not entirely corrupted by the decadence and egotistical superficiality of our distorted and arbitrary communities. I speak of love. Love is such a wonderful and universal feeling, a feeling that spins us round and elevates us to the stars, because it is a cord that connects our childhood with the universe. There lies a deeper meaning in the fact that the name for the experience of community, the feeling that connects us with humanity: love, human love, is the same name that we use for the love between the sexes that connects us with the following generations. Damn the soulless who do not shiver when they hear of love! Damn those for whom sexual satisfaction is nothing but a physical sensation! Love sets the world alight and sends sparks through our being. It is the deepest and most powerful way to understand the most precious that we have.

I have talked about the gap between us, the new human beings, and the masses, and about the necessity to separate ourselves from those united by the state. This might seem to contradict my belief that a love for humanity is part of our most genuine being. Let me explain: on the one hand, it seems clear that all contemporary human beings – the civilized as well as the others – are so closely related to us that it is difficult not to love them as we love anyone who is close to us. On the other hand, the relationship is as difficult as it often is with our closest relatives: they are very close to us in their being and their characteristics, and we do feel the bond of blood and we do love them – but we cannot live with them. Most of our contemporaries have deformed their humanity because of their statist and social lowliness and stupidity; they have also deformed their animalness with their hypocrisy, false morality, cowardice, and unnaturalness. Even during occasional hours of clarity or despair they cannot shed their masks. They have blocked their way to the universe; they have forgotten that they can turn themselves into Gods.

We want to be everything though: humans, animals, and Gods! We want to be heroes! So for the love of humanity that has lost its way, for the love of those who will come after us, for the love, finally, of the best in ourselves, we want to leave these people, we want our own company and our own lives! Away from the state, as far as we can get! Away from goods and commerce! Away from the philistines! Let us – us few who feel like heirs to the millennia, who feel simple and eternal, who are Gods – form a small community in joy and activity. Let us create ourselves as exemplary human beings. Let us express all our desires: the desire for quietism as well as activism; the desire for reflection as well as celebration; the desire for labor as well as relaxation. There is no other way for us!

This intimate belief is born from grief: we want to feel the highest joy of creation because we are desperate. Those who have already experienced it know that the only way to

awaken people is by religious genius, i.e., by the exemplary life of those who do everything to rise from the abyss. These individuals know that all these questions are serious existential questions. We who are few, we who are advanced – we need our pride! – cannot, and do not want to, wait any longer! So let us begin! Let us create our communal life, let us form centres of a new kind of being, let us free ourselves from the commonness of our contemporaries!"

Let us move a little closer to the present time with our examples now. In order to do so I will turn to volumes two and three of Robert Graham's *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas* to see if, or in what connection, love comes into the arguments and ideas of those contained within. These volumes cover the period from 1939 to the early 2000s. Here a first notable entry comes from the British writer, pacifist-anarchist and one time colleague of Emma Goldman, Ethel Mannin, who, as part of the conclusion to her book *Bread and Roses*, writes on the subject of progress being "the realisation of our Utopias" in the following way:

"The history of bloody revolution everywhere is the history of failure. Revolution there must be, the 'complete change, turning upside down, great reversal of conditions, fundamental reconstruction,' of the dictionary definition of the word, but people are not to be bludgeoned into it; only what is achieved through the great upsurge of the human spirit, out of the impassioned desire of the multitude, endures; what is imposed by force has no roots, and cannot last. There is no realization of Utopia without the change of values, and no change of values without change of heart-spiritual revolution. Utopia can be founded only on man's love for man; on love and cooperation; not on hate and the seizing of material power. When one section of the community triumphs over another it is only a matter of time before the section from whom power has been wrested reasserts itself - in the same way

that it is only a matter of time before a conquered nation rises once more to power, and to say that history repeats itself is only another way of saying that wars beget wars... The power of moral force has not yet been fully tried out, though in India one old, frail man [Gandhi] has demonstrated its potentialities - as the Early Christians demonstrated the potentialities of co-operative living according to the law of love."

Julian Beck was one of two founders of an experimental political theatre company in New York in 1947. Here writing an introduction for a play about a military prison during the Korean War, he makes a relevant comment about love:

"The work of any important playwright. Open at random. Ibsen, Marlowe, Strindberg, Cocteau. The language is always good, like light. Language is the key. It opens the doors that keep us locked in confining chambers, the Holy of Holies, the instrument of unification, communication, and from communication let us derive the word community. The community is love, impossible without it, and the syllogism affirms then that love, as we humans may supremely create it, rises and falls with language. Yes, the grunts of animals in the act of coitus - music for the ears of heaven. The proper sounds, the stresses, the silences, the grunts that rise from real feeling, satisfaction with food or with your body as I animally caress it; those sounds wrenched from my groin upward and out of the throat, they please you, because they are honest and near to God."

David Dellinger was an American activist who, in the piece the following is taken from, is writing about communalism (living in communes), the problems that may be encountered there, and the qualities necessary in those who do:

"the members must have a dominating vision of a new life and a thorough revulsion from the anti-social customs of present day society. To have the best chance of survival a new commune must be composed of persons who have the same type of disgust at the economic selfishness of society that the conscientious objector has concerning war and violence. They must have a vision of brotherly love in day to day economic and personal relationships similar to that of the historic pacifist in the area of international problems. Otherwise their devotion to community can be expected to be as temporary as the 'pacifism' of sentimental peace-lovers who abandon conscientious objection and war resistance when the 'enemy' commits some heinous atrocity or when pacifists are threatened with social ostracism, unemployment, or jail... What is essential is a feeling for the possibilities of human development - a dominating faith in freedom, love, mutual respect, social equality, and economic sharing as goals worth more than any of the temporary and partial bribes our present society can dangle in front of us... The 'commitment' I refer to involves commitment to a love-relationship of communal sharing among the members. But it includes more than that. It requires a transfer of values, a growth in social solidarity with all human beings, a liberation from dependence on the socially irresponsible and personally noxious titillations of our society."

I have discussed Peter Lamborn Wilson (Hakim Bey) many times before in several other books. It is worth reminding ourselves here, however, of something he has to say about his concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone in a context of love:

"we can speak of a natural anthropology of the TAZ. The nuclear family is the base unit of consensus society, but not of the TAZ. ('Families!—how I hate them! the misers of love!'—Gide). The nuclear family, with its attendant 'oedipal miseries,' appears to have been a Neolithic invention, a response to the 'agricultural revolution' with its imposed scarcity and

its imposed hierarchy. The Paleolithic model is at once more primal and more radical: the band. The typical hunter/gatherer nomadic or semi-nomadic band consists of about 50 people. Within larger tribal societies the band-structure is fulfilled by clans within the tribe, or by sodalities such as initiatic or secret societies, hunt or war societies, gender societies, 'children's republics,' and so on. If the nuclear family is produced by scarcity (and results in miserliness), the band is produced by abundance—and results in prodigality. The family is closed, by genetics, by the male's possession of women and children, by the hierarchic totality of agricultural/industrial society. The band is open—not to everyone, of course, but to the affinity group, the initiates sworn to a bond of love. The band is not part of a larger hierarchy, but rather part of a horizontal pattern of custom, extended kinship, contract and alliance, spiritual affinities, etc. (American Indian society preserves certain aspects of this structure even now.)

In our own post-Spectacular Society of Simulation many forces are working—largely invisibly—to phase out the nuclear family and bring back the band. Breakdowns in the structure of Work resonate in the shattered 'stability' of the unit-home and unit-family. One's 'band' nowadays includes friends, ex-spouses and lovers, people met at different jobs and pow-wows, affinity groups, special interest networks, mail networks, etc. The nuclear family becomes more and more obviously a trap, a cultural sinkhole, a neurotic secret implosion of split atoms—and the obvious counter-strategy emerges spontaneously in the almost unconscious rediscovery of the more archaic and yet more post-industrial possibility of the band."

Ashanti Alston was a member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. For this he spent many years of his life in US prisons. As part of a talk on "Black Anarchism" in the early part of this century he made the following remarks:

"As a Panther, and as someone who went underground as an urban guerrilla, I have put my life on the line. I have watched my comrades die and spent most of my adult life in prison. But I still believe that we can win. Struggle is very tough and when you cross that line, you risk going to jail, getting seriously hurt, killed, and watching your comrades getting seriously hurt and killed. That is not a pretty picture, but that is what happens when you fight an entrenched oppressor. We are struggling and will make it rough for them, but struggle is also going to be rough for us too.

This is why we have to find ways to love and support each other through tough times. It is more than just believing that we can win: we need to have structures in place that can carry us through when we feel like we cannot go another step. I think we can move again if we can figure out some of those things. This system has got to come down. It hurts us every day and we can't give up. We have to get there. We have to find new ways."

So far in this chapter all I have done is give a few examples of how various anarchist-relevant people (mostly) imagined love (as an aspect of social community) had a part to play in the anarchism they were propagating and so the societies and relationships they imagined in a better future. This could involve a general love for human beings (a matter of feeling and, as a consequence, action) and also specific beliefs about love more personally considered ("free love", family organisation, etc.). But we can do better than this and now, using literature, and specifically some of the literature of Alan Moore, I want to up the stakes. I begin here on familiar territory by going back to *V for Vendetta* (V4V) which I recently interacted with at length in my queer apocalypse in part two of my book, *Black Seeds*. In this case, I want to begin with the character Valerie, the occupant of Room 4 (that is, one imagines, Room IV) in the Larkhill Resettlement Camp, a woman apparently hunted down and imprisoned because she was a lesbian. In terms of the

amount of time Valerie is involved in the plot of V4V she seems not to be an important character. But this is misleading for it is my view that Valerie is, in fact, *the most important character in the entire story*, the one responsible for V becoming who he is and so for everything that happens in the story as a result of this protagonist. In fact, if Valerie had not been in Room IV and had not had the courage to do what she did then V might never even have existed. Let me explain.

V4V imagines that the fascist Norsefire rounded up various social undesirables (from their point of view) and imprisoned them in "resettlement camps". (It seems clear they were not simply for "resettlement", however, as the book gives evidence of experimentation upon their inmates and also their murder. We can easily guess at Moore's inspiration for these camps in the Germany of 1933-1945.) These "social undesirables" covered a number of categories and one of them was apparently sexual minorities. (We do not know exactly why V was imprisoned because the story does not tell us. Its not really that important.) As a result, one of the people rounded up and imprisoned was Valerie whom we learn was a lesbian from Nottingham who became an actress. Moore gives her a background, written out by Valerie herself in the camp on a piece of toilet paper with a pencil she had hidden "inside her" for the purpose of writing and which she had pushed through a hole in the wall to V, which I want to reproduce here:

"I was born in Nottingham in 1957, and it rained a lot. I passed my eleven plus [this is an old educational exam which existed in the past in the UK education system in order to channel brighter students into better schools] and went to girl's grammar. I wanted to be an actress. I met my first girlfriend at school. Her name was Sara, she was fourteen and I was fifteen but we were both in Miss Watson's class. Her wrists, her wrists were beautiful.

I sat in biology class, staring at the pickled rabbit fetus in the jar, listening while Mr Hird said it was an adolescent phase that people outgrew. Sara did. I didn't.

In 1976 I stopped pretending and took a girl called Christine home to meet my parents. A week later I moved to London, enrolling at drama college. My mother said I broke her heart. But it was my integrity that was important. Is that so selfish? It sells for so little, but its all we have left in this place. It is the very last inch of us. But within that inch we are free.

London: I was happy in London. In 1981 I played Dandini in Cinderella. My first Rep work. The world was strange and rustling and busy, with invisible crowds behind the hot lights and all that breathless glamour. It was exciting and it was lonely. At nights I'd go to Green MJ or one of the other clubs, but I was stand-offish and didn't mix easily. I saw a lot of the scene, but I never felt comfortable: there so many of them just wanted to be gay. It was their life, their ambition, all they talked about... and I wanted more than that.

Work improved. I got small film roles, then bigger ones. In 1986 I starred in 'The Salt Flats'. It pulled in the awards but not the crowds. I met Ruth while working on that. We loved each other. We lived together, and on Valentine's Day she sent me roses, and, oh God, we had so much. Those were the best three years of my life.

In 1988 there was the war... and after that there were no more roses. Not for anybody.

In 1992, after the takeover, they started rounding up the gays. They took Ruth while she was out looking for food. Why are they so frightened of us? They burned her with cigarette ends and made her give them my name. She signed a statement saying I'd seduced her. I

didn't blame her. God! I loved her! I didn't blame her. But she did. She killed herself in her cell. She couldn't live with betraying me, with giving up that last inch. Oh Ruth.

They came for me. They told me that all my films would be burned. They shaved off my hair. They held my head down a toilet bowl and told jokes about lesbians. They brought me here and gave me drugs. I can't feel my tongue anymore. I can't speak. The other gay woman here, Rita, died two weeks ago. I imagine I'll die quite soon. It's strange that my life should end in such a terrible place but for three years I had roses and apologised to nobody. I shall die here. Every inch of me shall perish... Except one.

An inch. It's small and it's fragile and it's the only thing in the world that's worth having. We must never lose it, or sell it, or give it away. We must never let them take it from us. I don't know who you are or whether you're a man or a woman. I may never see you. I will never hug you or cry with you or get drunk with you. But I love you. I hope that you escape this place. I hope that the world turns and that things get better, and that one day people have roses again. I wish I could kiss you. Valerie x."

In the plot of V4V, receiving this note from Valerie, which tells the story of her search for happiness in life in spite of her dismissal and rejection by societal actors and her eventual capture and imprisonment, leads to Evey, who imagines herself imprisoned due to V's subterfuge, finding her own resolve and a new direction and motivation for her life. She too finds "that last inch" and refuses to cooperate with her imagined captors. This leads to the reveal that her imprisonment has been a pretence carried out by V in order that Evey would come to a point of transformation in which she sees everything differently. It is a point, so V tells us, which he himself had reached in the room next to Valerie's in Larkhill when he had originally received Valerie's scribbled note (which was and is very

real) after she pushed it through the wall. Valerie's tale of rejection and persecution - interspersed with three years of blissful lesbian love - is what changed V and turned him into the motivated anarchist that appears in V4V. It is also, subsequently, that which motivated Evey to change and join him in that task. It is why V maintains that he loves Evey and acts from love in the things that he does, both to her and to others. The entire story here is, thus, motivated by oppressed love as part of a story in which actualised love opposes the physical force and coercion that motivates Norsefire and against which V, Valerie, and eventually Evey, fight.

V for Vendetta is "only" a fiction but it is significant that it was written in the 1980s when actual gay and lesbian love was itself genuinely oppressed, both culturally and politically. The UK Conservative government of the time (of which both Moore and artist David Lloyd would have been especially aware) engaged in anti-homosexual propaganda and lawmaking (against which Alan Moore himself was politically engaged with works such as *The Mirror of Love*). There were also campaigns, such as that led by Mary Whitehouse with her reactionary group the "National Viewers and Listeners Association", which decried any depiction of lesbians and gays in TV or on film. The newspapers of the time were virulently anti-gay in comment pieces and the tone of their journalism, and proactively outed and hounded gay and lesbian celebrities such as Freddie Mercury. It is consequently not at all insignificant that Alan Moore should make a lesbian character's love, and her societal persecution for it, the central and motivating factor of his tale (and one which often seems to go unnoticed by those more influenced by the intensely sub-par American film version of *V for Vendetta* than the book). It is also hardly irrelevant that, at the time, Moore himself was part of a love triangle in his own home in that he was married to a woman whilst also sharing another female lover with his then wife of the time who lived together with them. This story was then personal for Moore and not merely some fiction.

This, I hope, gives some sense of the importance and centrality of love to *V for Vendetta*. People persecuted for love? Love being proposed as that which is to counter physical force and violence as societal motivation? It has been pointed out before how, in *V4V*, the forces of Norsefire, as shown in and through the Norsefire characters portrayed, know only frustration in love and this is deliberate in terms of the story. Adam Susan's computer tells him "I love you" (V, it is revealed, has had access to this computer all along) and he reels back stunned, crying out. He later asks the computer if he is loved but the sense is one of frustration for he is not loved; he, like all of those working for or connected to Norsefire, are strangers to love and apparently incapable of it. They are portrayed as those inveigled in systems of force, violence and manipulation in a way which suggests some either/or. So, as beholden to force and coercion, they neither know love nor its unique motivations, rewards and pleasures. They simply want people to do as they are told, for things to be made to run a certain way, one in which they have not love but only a possibly fragile power. They do not know the motives and relations of love which V claims to be motivated by himself as he cultivates roses, a symbol of love because of their relation to love's happiness in the story, in memory of Valerie. The opposition here is, thus, very clear and very stark - love or violence, love or power, love or control, love or coercion.

And this is not the only place in Moore's fiction where this occurs for, if we turn to the later *Lost Girls*, we see it again. The story of *Lost Girls* takes place against the looming, patriarchal, deeply moralist and coercively violent, backdrop of the First World War. It is the transgressively pornographic story of three beloved characters from literature - Dorothy Gale (*The Wizard of Oz*), Alice Fairchild (*Alice in Wonderland*) and Wendy Darling (*Peter Pan*) - and their chance meeting at an Austrian hotel - the Hotel Himmelgarten (Hotel Heaven Garden) - and their subsequent rehabilitation of themselves from past lives

of sexual complication (if not to say violence and/or coercion) through repeated acts of consensual sexual love and sexual imagination in and through story. Hotel Himmelgarten, so it transpires, is run by a manager (Monsieur Rougeur) who has a mentality of free love of his own and so he has set up his hotel, an oasis from the world outside as the name suggests, with a mentality of open sexuality and the free sharing of love between consenting guests and staff in mind. Consequently, each room in the hotel is provided with literary pornography in the form of the "White Book" which includes lascivious and transgressive tales and erotic drawings which Moore (along with his wife and the artist for the book, Melinda Gebbie) has researched and taken/copied from erotic writers and artists of the age in which the story itself is set.

Lost Girls is a story told in three books of ten chapters each. The plot itself is not of direct concern here but the theme of violence versus love is. In short, each character is introduced with a sexual spin on what we know of these characters from their more conventional sources such that sex - and so love - becomes a coercively problematic subject in each of their lives which needs to be worked out in the story. Here the theme of violence versus love plays its part. The love, of course, is provided by these characters who engage in sex scene after sex scene throughout the book but always with an overt example of sexual imagination to accompany it. (Most usually this is one of these characters recounting an incident from their past whilst all engage in sexual play in differing contexts and surroundings.) In doing so, they "make love" whilst making use of sexual imagination and so reimagine who they are as people, recontextualising past experiences through the loving creation (physical and in the sexual imagination) of new ones. This is contrasted both with the violent and unpleasant sexuality (and so imagined lack of "love") encountered in their past (in this book Captain Hook is a public sexual predator of teens whom Wendy has to confront, for example, and Alice's rabbit is an

older family friend called Bunny who takes sexual advantage of her when she is home alone) but also that outside of Hotel Himmelgarten in the "ordinary world" where men, so it is imagined, organise their world by violence and coercion and seemingly prefer conflict to love.

This is demonstrated in the closing chapters of each of the three books. In chapter ten, "Stravinsky", the three women go to the opening performance of Stravinsky's ballet "The Rite of Spring" in Paris, a historical event from May 29th 1913 in which the crowd apparently rioted at what was presented to them in the reimagining of ancient Russian pagan rituals and a girl who dances herself to death as a sacrifice accompanied by avant-garde music, costumes and dancing. In Moore's retelling, however, whilst the crowd get angry and turn to violence, his three female protagonists engage in quite public and explicit sexual interactions in the stalls to which the rest of the audience seem oblivious. Chapter twenty, Snicker-Snack, is then the story of a debauched, sexuality-infused trip the three women, now well acquainted, take to an island on the Bodensee directly contrasted (each page is two split panels) with a depiction of the murder by an assassin of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the proximate event which led to the First World War. Finally, chapter thirty, "The Mirror: Reprise and Crescendo (Who Dreamed It?)" depicts the women after their final night of love together in Hotel Himmelgarten (now abandoned), their departure, the hotel's invasion by soldiers and the bleak violence and death of the First World War in an anonymous field in which a young man lays dying and bleeding, a hole where his stomach used to be. The message could here not be clearer: we could all live in a Utopia of physical and sexually imaginative love but, instead, we go (either personally or collectively) to foreign fields to kill strangers, often dying in the process ourselves. Implicitly, the question is then asked: which would you rather be doing? Unfortunately, in

light of such a story needing to be written, it seems the answer is not as obvious as first thought.

In the context of an imaginary love paradise (which is what Hotel Himmelgarten is such that even very uptight and strait-laced characters get in on the loving action - the most obvious example being Wendy's imagined husband in the book, an older man estranged from physical love who, in the hotel, has gay penetrative sex with an Austrian soldier convalescing there whom he then gets into a fist fight with at the end after war has broken out) one sees the utopian aspect of Moore and Gebbie's vision. This is not merely a story: it is a manifesto. The authors are RECOMMENDING guilt-free consensual physical love and accompanying sexual imagination as better, as beneficial, for society - especially as contrasted with the violence, coercion and power-seeking which leads to exploitation, domination and war. On one level, then, the book really is as blunt as "make love not war" - and the authors are entirely serious about such a message.

To be serious about it, however, one requires a vision of love and Alan Moore gives ample evidence in his work of having such a thing. This is a vision which crosses all kinds of boundaries (marital, family or sexual preference ones being only the most trivial of examples) and is politically engaged and engaging as in the aforementioned *The Mirror of Love*, written as a protest against UK Conservative Party anti-gay legislation, or the later essay *25,000 Years of Erotic Freedom* which basically argues that the erotically free and engaged, the actively and openly loving, are the more creative, positive and beneficial members of society and, indeed, that societies made up of such people and relations are better societies, more positive and supportive societies, more creative societies, than those made up of the erotically frustrated, closed off or denied who we might imagine

instead as the loveless. In fact, when one looks at the broad sweep of Moore's work, such themes seem to be as a golden seam running right through it.

I do not have time or space to develop that particular line of thought, however, but I do have time to example Moore's vision of love. The source is a strange one but what Moore has to say about love in it seems so important that it must be grappled with. I am talking here about Moore's run on the horror comic *Swamp Thing* in the mid-1980s and particularly issue 34 of that run, "Rite of Spring" (yes, recalling exactly the same ballet-related subject matter he later uses again in *Lost Girls*), where there is depicted a loving and extremely psychedelic physical scene between the lead woman of the piece, Abby Cable, and the Swamp Thing itself when they realise and admit that they love each other. (Swamp Thing, at least as Moore recreated him at the beginning of his run writing the character in January 1984, is a conscious plant elemental and so not a human being at all, essentially making this an example of "loving the earth".)

Issue 34 begins with Abby Cable's husband in hospital and not expected to recover from injuries accrued by his recent possession by a villain of the comic, Arcane. (Arcane is actually Abby's uncle but the full ins and outs of the story need not concern us here.) Abby has been becoming estranged from her husband for many previous issues by the time we get to issue 34. Now faced with her estranged husband finally passing on, she goes to be with the Swamp Thing (whom she has previously had some affection for as, in the past, he was imagined, incorrectly, to be a human being called Alec Holland [Abby still refers to him as "Alec"] who, due to an explosion and a magic scientific formula, was believed, at first, to have been somehow turned into a plant) who literally lives in the Louisiana swamp and, as a character, is some form of "representative of the earth" yet

also a character (because a consciousness) of his own. As we see here in issue 34, he has feelings and thoughts of his own, as a result, too.

When Abby first meets the Swamp Thing in the swamp in this issue she is familiar, plucking a flower from his body mass for her hair. (Swamp Thing is a tangled mass of vegetation in anthropomorphic form, the result of the processes which created him.) That the events of the issue play out in spring is pertinent since the image is one of new life and fresh growth. Abby wants to talk to Swamp Thing and it is about her affections. There is some awkwardness as Abby stumbles her way to letting the Swamp Thing know that she has affections for him, affections, as it transpires, that are returned. Here, I want to take up the dialogue of the issue itself:

Abby: Oh hell. There's something wrong with me. I build things up in my mind. I read things into the way you look at me, kid myself that maybe you feel the same as I do. But you're a plant, for god's sake! Just saying it out loud, I mean, its just so funny. How could you love me?

Swamp Thing: Deeply... silently... and for too many years.

Abby: You... you never said.

Swamp Thing: No. I thought it would frighten you. Abby? What do we do now?

Abby: I've never kissed you.

Swamp Thing: It would be unpleasant for you. Abby, we are so different.

(They kiss and embrace.)

Abby: Oh. Its like lime but not as sharp.

Swamp Thing: Do you like lime?

Abby: Its my favourite. You want to walk for a while?

(They walk.)

Swamp Thing: Abby?

Abby: Yes?

Swamp Thing: You... are human. You need more from love than the taste of lime.

Abby: Ugh. You're talking about sex, right? Well, listen. I mean, I have, you know, thought about all that, but, I mean, I know that the physical side of things... I know that's not possible, but... Look, What I'm saying is that its not important to me. As long as all the other stuff is there, as long as you... well, want me, I guess, and sort of care about me...

Swamp Thing: But there should be some form of communion...

Abby: Yeah, yeah, I know, but it doesn't have to be physical.

Swamp Thing: No. Please wait here for a moment.

(Swamp Thing goes down into the water of the swamp and rips a part of himself that looks something like a yam out of his chest, washing it in the water. He then presents it to Abby.)

Abby: Ugh. What do you want me to... You mean I'm supposed to eat it?

Swamp Thing: Yes. Does the idea repel you?

Abby: No, not anymore. The first time I thought about somebody eating part of you, I... well I threw up. But if this is something that you want me to do...

Swamp Thing: It is.

(Abby takes a bite.)

Abby: Its great. Its like a sort of perfume taste, like cardamom. Mmm, this is really good. You wanted to do this as, like, a symbolic thing?

Swamp Thing: No, not entirely.

Abby: What do you mean? Is there something else I should have... ugh... Alec? Alec, everything looks sort of... strange.

Swamp Thing: How do you mean "strange"?

Abby: Oh. Look at the swamp. Its all of fire. Millions of birthday candles. And look at me! All these strands of pearly stuff. Alec, what's happened to everything?

Swamp Thing: You ate the fruit, Abby. You absorbed a little of my consciousness, my perceptions.

Abby: You mean... this is how you see things?

Swamp Thing: Not all of the time. Only when I wish to. Do you like it?

Abby: Oh, its... These strands, you're made of them too. Everything's made of them... silky, luminous cobwebs. And these little stars, these little jewels of light that drift about inside you. I don't have any of those.

Swamp Thing: No. Those are insects.

Abby: Everything's alive... and its all made from the same stuff. I never realised. I never realised that the world was like this.

Communion: Spring came and everything in the world woke up. My hand shatters the pool, a hundred glass beads exploding out between my fingers. A brief anti-gravity necklace settles against my throat, collapsing, dissolving, warm as it trickles away. Below the water, the sudden cold frottage of fish skin, slick and silver against my instep. It twists, flickers, disappears. The bubbles rise... The threadlights, a blazing cat's cradle inside me, inside him. Where we touch, the fibres merge and intertangle. I am no longer certain where I end... where he begins. I feel my own hand as he feels it, a warm bird caged within my strong green fingers, pulse hammering in its breast. We blur together, unresisting... the bubbles rise. A smear of platinum scales breaks the surface, rolling, resubmerging. There is a delicious ambiguity.

Looking up through his eyes: the pale woman gazes down, a burning flower adrift on the milk waterfall of her hair. Its lank tips draw clear sable brushstrokes between the lichens engraving my chest... She is so beautiful... I am so beautiful... A tide of emeralds engulfs me. I am falling into him. I don't care.

In him I ride the amber sap, oozing through miniature labyrinths. Clusters of insect eggs burn like nebulae, suspended in their unique and vine-wrought cosmos. Through him, I sprawl with the swamp, sopping, steaming, dragonflies stitching neon threads through the damp air surrounding me. Beyond him I wrestle the planet, sunk in loam to my elbows as it arches beneath me, tumbling endlessly through endless ink. The bark encrusts my flanks. The moss climbs my spine to embrace my shoulders. We are one creature and all that there is is in us.

Together we know the light, exploding upward in a birdcloud, fragmenting into whirring feathered shrapnel, dancers in the glare. But the light is not all that we know. Together we bathe in raw life: honey rolls across our tongue. The fragrance of decay, mesmeric and overwhelming, excites our nostrils. We savour both equally for life is not all that we comprehend. We are the world. Amid coiling, lightless mazes deep within us, rodents make love and wage vendettas, with needle teeth that tear and small hearts that spill poppies on black earth scented with urine. Tenderness. Passion. Violence. My enemy's blood erupts to fill my mouth with molten copper. I circle with the hawk moths at their conjugation, breathless at the alien desires abstracted in their dance. There is no contradiction... only the pulse. The pulse within the world. Within us. Within me.

It throbs, it breathes, in the world, in its fibres... The pulse quickens, strands tighten, drawn taut, a clenched glove in my stomach. Underground, buried claws wound the soil... savage

furrows fill with moisture... a fish twists... the bubbles rise... the world pulses... and shudders... with life... and death... with tide... and magma...

With me. With him.



(Swamp Thing and Abby Cable as drawn by Stephen Bissette and John Totleben)

The imagery of love, of lovers, here is quite striking and exceedingly intimate. Yet it is also unusual and even alien. It is fundamentally intersubjective and in a way that merges perhaps all subjects (or imagined subjects) into one (yet also not). I note first of all, then, that Swamp Thing points out Abby's seeming need - as a human being - for more than "a taste of lime". This emphasises the human being's need for physical intimacy when it comes to love. It is far from a matter of distance or separation. A human being, feeling love, wants to be physically close to the beloved, to touch them, to experience their own physicality and nearness. Love is nurtured and enhanced, fed, by proximity. Swamp Thing seems to be very aware of this fact and Abby, in her response, acknowledges its truth.

But there are obvious problems here for Abby and Swamp Thing are utterly different in physical terms. (Swamp Thing is not even an animal but a conglomeration of plants and even insects that find a home within his mass.) The solution Swamp Thing calls "communion", something which involves ingesting a presumably psychotropic component of his "body", allows Abby to experience reality in some way as he does. That is, he literally devises a way for Abby to physically and mentally share his reality. With the use of the term "communion" and the means of achieving it - ingesting of a host - there are obvious comparisons to religious symbolism to be had here. Specifically, the Christian ritual of "Holy Communion" is an act where the Christian believer ingests (either symbolically or actually depending on the Christian confession) the body and blood of Jesus Christ. This is similarly a ceremony significantly described in Christian literature as a matter of love, in that case in the form of a willing sacrifice which said ritual commemorates (the "rite of spring" in Stravinsky's ballet similarly references a willing sacrifice). One imagines this, too, is thought an intimate, rather than a trivial, interaction. More established churches in fact conduct education around this ritual and there is often a ceremony which prepares the believer to enter explicitly into the practice.

For Abby and Swamp Thing "communion" means coalescing together, merging, not merely with each other but seemingly also with all life in general in a way relevant to the Hermetic, alchemical and Gaian ideas I have referenced before. It is something which leads to a transformation of consciousness, an altering of reality. Here, as we have seen elsewhere, life seems to be a co-entailing, intimate, "loving", entangled phenomenon. Myths of total separation or pure subjectivity are utterly exposed under such thinking. The emphasis on the willingness of the participants here to allow themselves to be absorbed into the mass of life and love emphasises that they are not losing themselves by doing so but gaining something more, something of meaning, as if being part of a greater reality makes you even more yourself. In letting go, paradoxically, you also become. Moore skilfully uses language here to keep a balance between being a consciousness and aware of yourself but also being so much more than a consciousness by being intimate and intermingled with the consciousness of others. Moore can switch subjectivities mid-description such that it is now seemingly Abby speaking but then the Swamp Thing and suddenly now seemingly both together. The distinctions seem not always so relevant. What is more important is to participate and collaborate in the larger reality of which one, seeing differently and multiply and together, is now a part.

Love as communion is then not simply about communion with each other but communion with life itself in all its forms, life as an ecosystem, an intimate and constant relation, a participation in a much greater familiar and loving reality itself. Not merely Abby and Swamp Thing coalesce here but life and love do too. They are fully joined, inside each other physically and mentally, experiencing each other, but in a much more intimate way than more basic and vulgar (and less mutually implicating) descriptions might describe. And love, so Moore seems to say, is then precisely this, an intimacy of love, an intimacy of

life, an intimacy of physical and conscious experience, an intimacy of being and of feeling and of imagination: "a delicious ambiguity".

As it turns out, this idea is hardly restricted to fiction in a world in which "ecosexuality" exists. Ecosexuality, and so the sexual preference "ecosexual", is the postulation of the artist and academic Beth Stephens and her lover, the artist and former porn performer Annie Sprinkle. (Don't let "former porn performer" fool you. Annie also has a PhD.) Their book *Assuming the Ecosexual Position: The Earth as Lover*, from which I am now going to quote extensively, is the place where they describe what is now their over 20 year relationship with each other and with the earth, a relationship which has pulled other humans into the ecosexual position as well (not least in the shape of their many collaborators). Through art installations, theatre performance, walking tours, free street sex advice sessions, documentary film, political action, symposia and literature, Stephens and Sprinkle have essentially invented a sexuality and entirely recontextualised the way to see life on earth. According to the foreword of their book (labelled a "Foreplay") written by Una Chaudhuri, the authors' ecosexual project is about "bodied discovery" and an "alchemy" which produces far more than the sum of its parts. Fundamentally collaborative, it acts with the ethos of "collaboration-as-enjoyment" and invites everyone, whoever they are, to join in. Ecosexuality, as Chaudhuri reads it, is "a capacity of radical lovingness - a capacity anyone and everyone can manifest." This project does not lack ambition either for Chaudhuri suggests it is about nothing less than "transformation of the world". Thus:

"Seeking, making, and celebrating alliances with one after another of earth's elements, landscapes, geographies—the sea, the forest, ice, gold, coal, dirt—the Ecosexuals perform an ongoing revolution."

This, continues Chaudhuri, is a project which seeks to couple "ecology and enjoyment", something she imagines "the most radical thing one can do today" and is a matter of "ecospheric consciousness".

The Spanish writer, philosopher, art curator (and sometimes collaborator with Stephens and Sprinkle) Paul B. Preciado (who is a trans man) has compatible thoughts in his afterword to the text (which I shall come to in detail shortly). Preciado calls *Assuming the Ecosexual Position* a "love biography" and I very much agree. For, inasmuch as the book itself is largely a history of Stephens' and Sprinkle's relationship with each other and the earth, it is the story of their love and the path it has taken over two decades. Yet it is also what Preciado calls a "treatise" and elsewhere might be called a manifesto. Preciado, himself the author of *Counter-sexual Manifesto* which I referred to in my previous book, *Black Dog*, is not slow to see the political substance of ecosexuality in a world in which it might be laughed off as trivial, weird or hokey. Preciado sees the love involved in ecosexuality as "a project of collective transformation" and "eroticism understood as an anarcho-libertarian project". It is a "love relationship" become "collective movement" - and one which "transform[s] the spectator into a lover", which beckons one to "enter into a relationship of care and love" with Stephens and Sprinkle "and with all the other living beings on the planet, with the very totality of the planet as a living entity." Preciado credits the authors with inventing "a social architecture of cooperation and love alternative to traditional democratic political practice with its logic of representation and parties." He imagines that, as art, it is more powerful than politics and, as care, goes beyond the limitations of anger. He finishes his afterword by saying:

"Love is the central political concept of this ecosexual book. But not love the way it has been captured by the patriarchal-colonial language: not couple love, not family love, not love of

the nation, not love of purity, not love of property, but love as experimental collective practice extended to the totality of the planet."

So what is "ecosexuality"? What is an "ecosexual"? Well its all about love and love is a physical thing. Stephens and Sprinkle introduce their book like this:

"We are two ecosexual artists in love, in a relationship with each other as well as with the Sky, Sea, Appalachian Mountains, Lake Kallavesi in Finland, the soil in Austria, the Sun, the Moon, Coal, our late dog Bob and our current dog Butch, and other nonhuman and human entities. Our relationship with these ecological bodies is multigenerational. While we have been around only for a few decades, some of these entities are approximately four and a half billion years old. Our relationships with nature entities are simultaneously pure, sweet, and innocent, as well as complicated, messy, and taboo. Sometimes they are long distance, such as our love affair with the Moon. Sometimes they are very close, like when we walk barefoot in the grass or breathe the Sky deep inside our bodies.

What if we imagined the Earth as our lover instead of our mother? Or both? What if our bodies didn't stop at our skin but were much, much more expansive? What if we are the Earth, not separate? Since 2008, when we married the Earth, the two of us have been doing life and art experiments that explore these and other questions. This has been and continues to be an exciting expedition. Many people have joined us along the way. Our love for the Earth has also been rejected, misunderstood, and critiqued. Now, after many years of this ecosex adventure, we desire to share our stories, pollinate the results of our research, and proclaim our love for this magnificent home.

This is the story of how the two of us got together as a couple and became full-time, long-term collaborators, followed our muses, one experiment leading to the next until we fully embraced the ecosexual position. This book weaves together our experiences with field notes, ideas, discoveries, and various theories that we have created and explored. We begin by sharing a bit about ourselves, our backgrounds, and how we got together, became pollen-amorous, helped to grow the ecosex movement, and officially added the E for ecosexual to the LGBTQIA+E moniker. We'll share some real-life dramas, like when we were protested by anti-porn feminists, tagged by a neo-Nazi in a balaclava, and had a SWAT team surveil our wedding. We will describe how we turned our breast cancer treatments into romantic, sexy theater and performance. We will weave tales of our travels around the planet to present our work at various places, including sex toy shops, a laundromat, churches, and off-grid activist camps. We've also done work at some of the best museums, galleries, and art exhibitions in the world, including the Venice Biennale, documenta 14, and New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Our journey has included thousands of collaborators and supporters, and we could include only a sampling of their names in this book. If you worked with us and your name was left out, we apologize in advance. It doesn't mean we don't appreciate everything you did, because we do. Our websites have full detailed credits for all of our symposiums, performances, and events, and we intend to keep those websites functioning for years to come.

This book is an invitation to collaborate and a call to deepen our relationship with the Earth. It certainly has been an adventure for us to write. We hope that you enjoy it. Perhaps you may discover you are just a little bit or a whole helluva lot ecosexual. In any case, we

hope that one day our paths will cross with yours, and we can further discuss loving the Earth and cross-pollinate with you."

On beginning to use the language and terminology of "ecosex" the authors say this in their introduction:

"Nineteen years ago, we fell in love and immediately began making art projects together about our relationship, love, and pleasure. We could not have imagined that one day we would call ourselves ecosexuals and take the Earth as our lover, or that we would make work about environmental issues. Yet here we are, ecosexuals, following our muse, our desire, imaginations, and our conscience as we engage in the daily practices of living ecosexually. After we did a performance where we married the Earth, we started using the word ecosex, because it sounded like what we were doing. Then we adapted it to fit our needs. When we first used ecosex to describe what we were doing and ecosexual to describe our sexual identity and our work, we were being a little tongue in cheek. But then after a while we saw that there really was something to it. Suddenly things got serious. We started asking ourselves: What is ecosex? Who are the ecosexuals and what do they do exactly? Where did the concepts behind ecosexuality develop? How can ecosex art and activism help bring about much needed change? And what inspired us to assume the ecosexual position?"

A point to make here is that all I am going to be able to do in this moment is write about ecosexuality as Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle have invented (or discovered) it together. But ecosexuality, as a form of love, as a matter of love, is not primarily a theory or a discourse: it is both an action and a reality. It is something done, experienced, lived, something ontological. But what is that doing, experiencing and living about? The authors define "ecosexual" in the following ways:

"ecosexual... : eco from ancient Greek oikos; sexual from Latin, sexuales. 1. A person who finds nature romantic, sensual, erotic, or sexy, which can include humans or not. 2. A new sexual identity (self-identified). 3. A person who takes the Earth as their lover. 4. A term used in dating advertisements. 5. An environmental activist strategy. 6. A grassroots movement. 7. A person who has a more expanded concept of what sex and orgasm are beyond mainstream definitions. 8. A person who imagines sex as an ecology that extends beyond the physical body. 9. Other definitions as yet to be determined."

Writing personal notes about this after the definition, Beth Stephens refers to the background of both authors in "queer sex positivity" and "environmentalism" and a growing realisation "that ecosexuality could be an expanded experience of love and sensual pleasure." This reminds the reader of the book's opening questions: "What if our bodies didn't stop at our skin but were much, much more expansive? What if we are the Earth, not separate?" Stephens speaks of the authors' growing sense of:

"a more universal, enormous love for each other and for the Earth and even the cosmos. Engaging in an ecosexual vision of the world expanded our notion of sex and eroticism way beyond genital contact, beyond corporeal sex, and even beyond erotic energy exchange."

The point here is that this is not something sordid and silly, perhaps the egocentric and eccentric artistic expressions of a couple of California-based kooks. Say what else you like about ecosexuality, but its authors do not regard it as trivial or as a joke and they have expended decades worth of effort in activism for it. They take it all very seriously. They see it (from human point of view) as an expansion of love and an ongoing exploration of what it means to be a physical being in a living environment. They imagine to build "an ecology of relationships". They marry art, life, politics, love and the earth together until

they are one. (One imagines that in ecosexuality all relationships are poly with root systems constantly reaching out for new and other collaborations.) Sprinkle, a sex-positive feminist with an extensive personal history of sexual performance, both commercial and artistic (my favourite title of all the pieces of her work is "Public Cervix Announcement" which appears to be exactly what it sounds like), describes sex as "a way of embracing life and love", something "liberating, fun and creative. A great adventure" and this is the mentality with which Stephens and Sprinkle approach their ecosexual project in and through their lives and relationships which, expanded to planetary scale, are obviously numerous! Theoretically speaking, however, ecosexuality requires a manifesto, something which acts as the magnet pulling in like minds. The authors realised this and so came up with the following in 2011:

"ECOSEX MANIFESTO 1.0

(I) WE ARE THE ECOSEXUALS.

The Earth is our lover. We are madly, passionately, and fiercely in love, and we are grateful for this relationship each and every day. In order to create a more mutual and sustainable relationship with the Earth, we collaborate with nature. We treat the Earth with kindness, respect, and affection.

(II) WE MAKE LOVE WITH THE EARTH.

We are aquaphiles, terraphiles, pyrophiles, and aerophiles. We shamelessly hug trees, massage the Earth with our feet, and talk erotically to plants. We are skinny dippers, sun worshippers, and stargazers. We caress rocks, are pleased by waterfalls, and admire the Earth's curves often. We make love to the Earth through our senses. We celebrate our E-spots. We are very dirty.

(III) WE ARE A RAPIDLY GROWING GLOBAL COMMUNITY OF ECOSEXUALS.

This community includes artists, academics, sex workers, sexologists, healers, environmental activists, nature fetishists, gardeners, businesspeople, therapists, lawyers, peace activists, ecofeminists, scientists, educators, revolutionaries, critters, and other entities from diverse walks of life. Some of us are sexecologists, researching and exploring the places where sexology and ecology intersect in our culture. As consumers we aim to buy less. When we can, we buy green, organic, and local. Whether on farms, at sea, in the woods, or in small towns or large cities, we connect and empathize with nature.

(IV) WE ARE ECOSEX ACTIVISTS.

We will save the mountains, waters, and skies by any means necessary, especially through love, joy, and our powers of seduction. We will stop the rape, abuse, and the poisoning of the Earth. We do not condone the use of violence, although we recognize that some ecosexuals may choose to fight those most guilty of destroying the Earth with public disobedience and with anarchist and radical environmental activist strategies. We embrace the revolutionary tactics of art, music, poetry, humor, and sex. We work and play tirelessly for Earth justice and global peace. Bombs hurt.

(V) ECOSEXUAL IS AN IDENTITY.

For some of us, being ecosexual is our primary (sexual) identity, whereas for others it is not. Ecosexuals can be LGBTQIA+, heterosexual, asexual, and/or Other. We invite and encourage ecosexuals to come out. We are everywhere. We are polymorphous and pollen-amorous. We educate people about ecosex culture, community, and practices. We hold these truths to be self-evident: that we are all part of, not separate from, nature. Thus all sex is ecosex.

(VI) *THE ECOSEX PLEDGE*

I promise to love, honor, and cherish you, Earth, until death brings us closer together forever.

¡ VIVA LA ECOSEX REVOLUCIÓN !"

A second manifesto was also written later on:

"ECOSEXUAL MANIFESTO 2.0

We are Ecosexuals: the earth is our lover.

Fiercely in love, we are permanently grateful for this relationship. To create a more mutual and sustainable union with our lover, we collaborate with nature. We treat the earth with respect, affection and sensuality.

We are aquaphiles, terraphiles, pyrophiles, and aerophiles.

We are skinny-dippers, sun worshippers, and stargazers.

We are artists, sex workers, sexologists, academics, environmental and peace activists, feminists, eco-immigrants, putos y putas, trans/humanistas, nature fetishists, gender-bending gardeners, therapists, scientists and educators, revolutionaries, dandies, pollen-amorous cultural monsters with dogs and other entities from radical ecologies...

*Whether LGBTQI, hetero, sexual, or Other, our primary drive and identity is being Ecosexual!
Viva la ECOSEX REVOLUTION!"*

In part here, then, ecosexuality is ideological and visionary: it is an imagination of the earth and so of all the life upon it. Here "earth as lover" (and so life as lovers) takes pride of place - but not exclusively so. The authors say: "Our manifesto... boldly states that we see the Earth as our lover, that we love the Earth and find erotic potential in nature, and we are turning our love for the Earth into revolutionary actions." A more common view of Earth is "as mother" and, in this respect, it entangles feminist issues with ecological ones and becomes close to the ecofeminist movement which I interacted with in my "queer apocalypse" in *Black Seeds* when discussing *Mad Max*. Stephens and Sprinkle acknowledge this and work theoretically with the images of "mother" and "lover" in order to theorise meanings and consequences. Inasmuch as Earth is gendered in discourse, it is ripe for ideological and even visionary usages. On this Stephens and Sprinkle say:

"We wanted to go beyond the gender binary when it came to thinking about the Earth. As bad grrrl feminists, we were skeptical of binary constructions of the Earth as Mother/ Other. As queers, we were eager to embrace the concept of the Earth as nonbinary or trans. Mothers (including Mother Earth) have not been treated terribly well in popular culture, which tends to construct the ideal mother as either asexual or heterosexual, self-sacrificing, white, and Christian. As feminists, we have a great deal of empathy and respect for the first generation of ecofeminists who promoted the idea of Earth as Mother to bring attention to the need for environmental activism. As queers and ecosexuals we wanted to expand the idea of environmentalism by combining it with the sex-positive feminism of the nineties, the cultural context from which our art careers were nourished. Today, as ageing women whose bodies are no longer taut, we want to acknowledge the materiality of nature, a materiality

that doesn't always conform to patriarchal anthropomorphizing fantasies of nubile, beautiful, fertile women or of dangerous vagina dentatas ready to do away with humanity at the drop of a hat. To counter these stereotypes, we adopted the metaphor of the lover instead."

In this regard, the authors quote ecofeminist Greta Gaard who has explored the connections between queer theory and ecofeminism. Gaard, for example, has written:

"A queer ecofeminist perspective would argue that liberating the erotic requires conceptualizing humans as equal participants in culture and in nature, able to explore the eroticism of reason and the unique rationality of the erotic."

Expanding upon this in terms of their own agenda, Stephens and Sprinkle say:

"To be someone's lover is more open-ended than being their mother. The lover assumes a relationship based on romance, sexual attraction, and sensual pleasure. The lover's relationship does not assume identities that conform to the gender binary and power dynamics of male and female. The category of the lover is more slippery than that of parent and avoids heteronormative family ideology. Our metaphorical and material shift to Earth as lover holds the potential to create relationships between humans and nonhumans that might lessen destructive and controlling practices such as taking resources (mining) or domesticating (damming rivers and streams). The lover archetype evokes pleasure or jouissance based on mutual needs and desires. Earth as lover has the potential to inspire humans to give as well as receive both love and support from the Earth."

Furthermore, the category of Mother represents an ideological construction that has been used to police the excess of pleasure and ecstasy, whereas the lover represents the promise of the as-yet-unknown. A lover is someone we want to get to know better, treat well, pamper, romance, and pleasure. Most to the point, if one does not treat a lover well, the lover can leave for someone else who will treat them better. While the Earth can't actually leave us, it can become so inhospitable that we have to live in radically different ways on it—or leave it."

It is as well to point out here what such an agenda has involved. First of all, before coming to specifics, we should note that the authors imagine that their love is joyful. Despite the fact that the Earth undergoes many trials today, it is not simply a constantly depressing matter of "woe is me" (and it never can be). They say:

"We love [the] idea of navigating times of struggle through art, dance, music, and sexy fun. We believe that pleasure activism can be a path that empowers many of us who are outside the mainstream to enact change. Just as violence is powerful, pleasure can be powerful, too. Perhaps even more."

This leads to a discussion of some of the activities our authors have designed and taken part in over two decades. These began when Stephens, then a post-graduate student, wanted to use a print Annie Sprinkle had made of her tits (Sprinkle was, by this time, a burgeoning avant-garde sexual artist after her porn career) in a show of queer visual art. This led to further work together as part of Stephens' studies and, finally, to their moving in together and becoming legal domestic partners several years later. This is important in this story because from it they learned that the ritual and ceremony of the wedding,

something they would later go on to perform several times over in many weddings with natural phenomena, can have a powerful effect. As Stephens says:

"This experience led us to recognize the power that large-scale ceremonies have to generate feelings of connectedness, not only between the parties directly involved but with communities at large. We realized how the wedding ritual could be used as a platform from which we could speak about political issues and transmit different kinds of messages regarding Love to our audiences. This was especially relevant because of the mystique of the wedding in just about every culture on Earth. We were surprised by how much the domestic partner ceremony meant to the participating queers and nonqueers alike."

Here the wedding stands as a symbol and ceremonial of love as a communal occasion in which such love can be expressed amongst all those gathered. Love is also expressly mentioned here as that which "can heal wounds". Such a realisation led Stephens and Sprinkle to inaugurate a seven year durational art project known as the "Love Art Lab" (Stephens was, by this time, an academic employed at the University of California Santa Cruz [along with colleague and project supporter, Donna Haraway] and so could incorporate this work into her academic career as research or work of academic value and purpose) in which each year was organised around a theme deriving from the philosophy of chakras with associated colours, areas of the body and so on. Each year incorporated a wedding, at least partly to publicly and politically propose love as the solution to imagined ecological and political problems. As their artist statement for the first of their seven weddings under the banner of the Love Art Lab project, the Red Wedding, maintains:

"Our seven years of love as art is intended to share our love with our friends, family, community, and beyond. Through generating and celebrating love we hope to bring about positive change."

One way they imagined to do this artistically was through the art performance "Cuddle". In basic form, this is simply Stephens and Sprinkle lying in a bed in an art space with members of the public invited, at their own discretion, to join them in the bed for a cuddle for a limited amount of time. (Initially this was seven minutes.) As they say about this performance in its initial incarnation:

"At the time, we had a rescued black Labrador retriever named Bob. Bob loved to cuddle between us in bed, and that made us so happy that we wanted to share this joy and experience with others. We installed a double bed, a sign-up sheet, instructions, and a timer in the middle of the space. In honor of the Red Year theme of security we made a bedspread with the word security printed on it, thereby creating a security blanket. Once each week we donned red fleece cuddle outfits that we had made special at Haight Ashbury's Piedmont Boutique and spent five hours cuddling gallery visitors, who were invited to remove their shoes and socks and snuggle between us under our security blanket. We then set the timer for seven minutes.

Sometimes the person wanted to talk, or spoon, or play footsies. Sometimes they simply wanted to be held in silence. All kinds of people would come for a cuddle—even some of Annie's old porn fans. We never turned anyone away. Bob would join in the puppy pile, unless the person didn't want him in bed. Bob loved it, and he may have had the most fun of all."

I see this, as they seem to as well, as activism for love and affection. It is not their only example of it either. Another example of this which they have engaged in over many years (with other collaborators) is Sidewalk Sex Clinics in which some "sex experts" will set up in a space, preferably in public and outdoors, in order to dispense free sex, love and relationship advice to whoever sits down and requests some. This furthers the agenda of wanting to create a safe, loving, erotically involved community in general and, in doing so, has a political point as well. In discussing the time during this period when Annie Sprinkle was diagnosed with breast cancer, they detail how they turned this into art as well and they say that "we wanted our sexuality and love for each other to remain front and center." This, indeed, seems to be the point of their art and activism from the beginning of their relationship and, in and through it, they focus all of their activities, the whole of life, through the lens of love. A further good example of their activism for love and affection is then their art piece "Extreme Kiss" which, in the first instance, was a three hour kiss Stephens and Sprinkle performed at an art show curated by the activist and porn performer, Madison Young (about whom I spoke at the beginning of my previous book, *Black Dog*). It was performed on other occasions with variations built in. For example, on one occasion it was a naked kiss of one hour length set in the middle of a gallery where visitors had to look at their bodies kissing in order to look around the room. On a further occasion, in London in 2007 at an arranged "Extreme Kissing Workshop", it was a group event where people could either come with a kissing partner or take the chance of being paired up with a stranger (which some were). It was advertised like this:

"Stephens and Sprinkle will lead this unique workshop exploring kissing as conversation, as political intervention, as altered state, as erotic meditation, and as performance art. Bring a buddy to kiss for two hours straight—a friend, lover, or any willing collaborator. Or come solo and take a chance that you will find a kiss collaborator at the workshop, or even out on

King's Road. The first hour of the workshop will be in the Chelsea Theatre where you'll receive instruction, and we'll set intentions. Then Stephens, Sprinkle, and all participants will emerge onto King's Road for a two-hour-long public Kiss-in. The last hour of the workshop will be back at the theater for feedback and a closing. Extreme kissing can make you highly euphoric, so don't plan to drive right after the kiss."

Now, as it turned out, this event did not go as planned since when the group of what was eventually thirty people emerged into the street to begin a two hour mass kiss... people violently complained! It would seem that love and affection shown by fully clothed people in a public space in a totally non-lewd manner was found offensive by at least some people! Stephens and Sprinkle remark that the agitated complainants seemed to have found the kissing "threatening". As a result, they eventually continued their kissing in the theatre - but there was a surprise pay off most relevant to times like our own in 2025:

"After the workshop ended, we discovered that two of the singles who paired up at the beginning of the workshop were an Israeli woman and a Palestinian man. They had a great time kissing for the full two hours and didn't discover each other's nationality until after the workshop ended. Even though their countries were in conflict, they both demonstrated and experienced how an act as simple as kissing can bridge the distance between two people who stand on opposite sides in a long-running dispute. Kissing can be political! Could extreme kissing help create peace?"

Activities such as those mentioned above are, as Stephens and Sprinkle maintain in their book, the promotion of love. So it is highly appropriate that in 2008 one of their wedding events was "to the earth" as explained in their following "artist statement" about it:

"GREEN WEDDING TO THE EARTH ARTIST STATEMENT

On May 17, 2008, we will take vows to love, honor, and cherish the Earth, in our fourth wedding. We invite you to take vows with us.

Why vows to the earth, and why now? People often think of the Earth as Mother Earth. But these days the Earth is so battered, abused, exploited, polluted, blown up, and ripped apart that she can't handle the burden of being a full-time Mother anymore. Perhaps it would be better to imagine the Earth as a lover, because we tend to take care of our lovers instead of expecting them to take care of us. It's a more mutual and sustainable relationship. Mother Earth is probably in menopause and very tired.

The earth is our lover! With her abundant sensual delights, breathtaking beauty, her delicious scents, tastes, and occasional temper tantrums. She's magical, mysterious, curvaceous, exciting, and unpredictable. We love to nestle in her woods, walk barefoot on her skin, circulate erotic energy with her, and float in her luscious waters. She's a fantastic lover, and we simply can't live without her. It's painful to watch her suffer—to witness the unbelievable pollution of her oceans, her mountaintops brutally sliced off, deadly chemicals thrown at her, piles of electronic waste dumped all over her, her premature global warming, the pollution of her air, the holocaust of her trees . . . need we go on?

We are inspired by people that we know who are actively loving the earth, such as the pioneers of environmental art Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison. We are honored that they will do our wedding homily. We are inspired by the work of artist and activist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who will be so generous as to facilitate our vows. Ecoeducators Julia Butterfly

Hill, Kutira Décosterd, bell hooks, and Kaytea Petro are all teaching us new ways to love our Earth.

So we will enter into a deeper, more committed relationship with our Earth. We will vow to make more of an effort to be biodegradable, sustainable, to spend more time cleaning the beach, drive less, walk more, and we will install a greywater system in our house. We will vow to help make the environmental movement more fun and sexy. You're invited."

All this could sound terribly twee, "new age", self-indulgent and ultimately impotent. I am certain some hearing about these things would say so. But such criticisms, in a way, get exactly to the heart of the issues Stephens and Sprinkle raise in and through their love activism (which this brief discussion has barely scratched the surface of. Read their book and watch their films for the fuller story). For example, in their documentary film *Goodbye Gauley Mountain: An Ecosexual Love Story* Stephens and Sprinkle can be found hugging trees and fondling fruit and bathing naked in wild rivers. Sounds relatively easy to dismiss, right? But this film is also about the regular commercial practice of simply blowing up mountains (and anything on, in or around them) to pilfer their mineral resources for vast profit and at huge environmental cost to natural ecosystems (which are poisoned and destroyed by this activity). Do you think that is so easy to brush off?

Here the love activism meets the political reality of an abusive and exploitative system of political and economic relations that is about anything but love and affection. AND THAT, LOVE OR VIOLENCE, IN THE END, IS THE POINT. That is why Stephens and Sprinkle marry the earth and the sea and the Appalachian mountains where Stephens grew up and they made this film. In that it joins up with the political commentary Alan Moore gives in and through the character Swamp Thing who, in some respects, becomes "the green" as a

warrior in defence of itself. Stephens and Sprinkle, in their book, tell us that we too are the earth. And so shouldn't we seek to defend ourselves, defend our home, without which we are all dead? Isn't love a better overriding ethos for life, and for a planet that lives, than exploitation? (Love, that is, that, during their silver wedding to the rocks, was described as "companionship, reunion, making the way together, sharing our bread and our fluids, respecting and sexing, sexing up everything we touch.")

Simple, symbolic actions, done together, can have profound effects. Why do you think students and teachers in schools in some countries are required to stand before a flag and sing the national anthem at the start of every day? Why do you think in some places it is *de rigueur* to show some form of fealty to a passing monarch? What Stephens and Sprinkle teach, however, is communal love of the earth - and human beings as part of that earth which is to be loved. For example, of an occasion on the coast of Catalonia during which they participated in an Ecosex Workshop during which various performance offerings were shared with the group who were present, they say:

"The highlight of the day for us was when we all got down into doggy position, butts facing out to sea. Waves rolled in at just the right height to slap our asses and toss us like pebbles on the beach. This stirred our ecosexual brains, bodies, and libidos! We became pebbles! We squealed with delight, laughing hysterically.

There was no human-centric genital focus or contact during the whole workshop. We explored deep play in ways that felt new, innocent, and childlike. Experiencing ecosensual performances in a community of like-minded, adventurous people was surprising in that it brought us to a new kind of ecstasy. The love we generated together with and for the Earth was profound."

Of course, you can't make any money out of a group of people on the beach having fun together at the sea hitting their collective arses. There is no profit to be made in feeling one with the earth and no monetary payoff from extending the understanding of love. But is life in this new, planetary, even cosmological, sense about financial profit? Or would it be better off if it was about an all-encompassing form of experiential love, something that offers its own, very different, very transformative, rewards?

"Cuddling Athens

They say: close the borders.

We say: cuddle.

They say: build a wall.

We say: cuddle.

They say: fear the foreigner, watch the stranger.

They say: praise the individual, compete, win.

We say: cuddle.

Artists Annie Sprinkle & Beth Stephens have installed a bed within the museum lobby where they propose to cuddle every visitor who would like to participate for seven minutes. An active answer to the increasingly aggressive political measures taken globally against the survival of vulnerable bodies, the piece questions also the relationship between labor and sex, interrogating the exclusion of certain gestures and affects within the neoliberal regime." (Performed by Stephens and Sprinkle at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, Greece, April 8–10, 2017. This curatorial statement was written by the curator, Paul B. Preciado.)

Loving is acting or, as The Human League might have put it, Love is "Love Action". In an effort to educate, Stephens and Sprinkle come up with an appropriately alchemical-adjacent diagram which lists just some of the ecosexual possibilities of earth, air, fire and water:



As sexecologists, we explore the places where sexology and ecology intersect in our culture. As part of our Dirty Sexecology performance, we presented this chart to help illustrate the range of ecosexual fetishes. Graphic design by Virginie Corominas. Authors' collection.

Love and materiality. Love and the elements. Love and the environment. Love with each other. Why can existence not be about love (as, I seem to recall, it actually is in the film *The Fifth Element*)? And so, to excerpt some concluding remarks from Stephens and Sprinkle in their book about both their projects and their ethos:

"Developing ecosex theories and practices has led us to ask questions about where the body begins and ends... As one can gather from the history of sex and pornography, definitions and attitudes toward sex and gender change from century to century, decade to decade, and year to year. As sexologists, sex educators, and artists, we like to envision future possibilities and new styles of sexual pleasure. Our work offers people an opportunity to expand their minds and create room for more sensual pleasure, experimentation, and satisfaction. With ecosex, we are in part trying to move toward an increasingly experiential way of being in our multidimensional bodies. This is in direct opposition to thinking of bodies as merely physical instruments meant to reproduce or provide labor for a handful of billionaires, their corporations, and their stockholders—bodies that go to work, return home, and consume products. It's about coming together, finding our shared humanity when power brokers and money grubbers try to divide us. Ecosexuality is a liberatory way of thinking about and being in one's body. It is, as Michel Foucault would have said, an ars erotica, or erotic art, rather than a science of sexuality...

We imagine how to have sex in ways that put our internal bodily systems into play with our external ecological environments. Ecosystems are unfixed; they move and change. Physical systems are interconnected; that's how they thrive. When people think of themselves as independent, autonomous beings, exclusive and fixed, they become rigid. Ecosexuality is an extremely fluid sexuality. When you are an ecosexual, you always have a potential lover, or many, such as the Earth, Sky, and Sea. This is especially relevant during times when people have to be alone or are social distancing from others...

We find it remarkable that killing a tree, or whole forests, is considered fine and normal, but loving a tree and trying to defend a forest are considered abnormal and perverse...

While we love to think about ecosex, it is more important to experience it in our bodies, share it with other bodies, take it in with our senses, and enjoy life while we are alive, when we have that luxury...

...to make humans fall in love again with the Earth."

There is one recognised historical anarchist who I have been a reader of for some years who did fashion his own anarchy explicitly out of love (he called it "amorous camaraderie") and his name was Émile Armand. I have discussed Armand and his anarchy many times before. Yet I make no apology for doing so again for I am COMPLETELY CONVINCED that he (together with, but separately from, Emma Goldman) have a point. That point is: THERE IS NO ANARCHY WITHOUT FREEING LOVE AND FREEING LOVE IS NECESSARY TO ANARCHY. It might even be the only genuinely workable basis for it given the place and importance of love in life. This is both to contradict old Kropotkin, with whom Goldman argued about free love in his own Bromley house, and all those modern commentators who relegate Armand to a peripheral, almost unknown and certainly insignificant, role in anarchist history. Au contraire, mes amis, Armand had hit the nail square on its big, overflowing purple head. FREEING LOVE IS THE REAL ISSUE.

As already indicated, in my previous anarchist writing I have discussed Armand several times before (not least in the case of America Scarfo's appeal to Armand over her love which I discussed in *Black Flag*). But there is an aspect of his thinking I have not discussed before which becomes relevant in my context here. This is his idea that love, physically expressed, should be normatively regarded as a social resource amongst like-minded associates rather than as something individually and romantically articulated in normally coupled scenarios and perhaps organised socially according to standardised institutions

and relationships (the Western marriage and nuclear family). In this, Armand becomes somewhat like the indigenous communities I discussed in *Black Dog* in anthropological context for whom sex was not a coupled, implicitly family-building phenomenon but a social lubricant divorced from coupling or offspring and family life. As a result, I want to discuss this a bit more and by bringing Gaetano Manfredonia and Francis Ronsin's essay "E. Armand and 'la camaraderie amoureuse': Revolutionary sexualism and the struggle against jealousy" into the discussion.

The essay of these two French-based academics is written in the context of "free love and the labour movement" which has a socialist context Armand himself may not have appreciated (as an individualist anarchist) but the essay is of some worth. It focuses on Armand's developing views on sexual love and relationships particularly after he restarted the anarchist journal *L'En-Dehors* (The Outside) in 1922. Armand himself was a twice married man (the second time, in 1911, to a wealthy woman which allowed him free reign to become a writer and publisher without need to worry) who had begun writing about sexuality as early as 1907 (when he was 35) with some, at that time, vague thoughts about "free love" (an anarchist *cause celebre* for some anarchists but an irrelevant side issue for others) and some words in favour of multiple partners or "plural love" as he then called it. There was nothing especially remarkable about anything he was saying at this time compared to what others, such as Emma Goldman, had been saying for years.

From the 1920s onwards, however, Armand begins to think of sexuality in "revolutionary" terms. Manfredonia and Ronsin take up the story:

"In the letters from readers (of L'En-Dehors) that he published and in his responses to them, Armand shared increasingly radical theses on sexuality. The debate arose from a letter

signed "Raphaële" that he printed in February 1924. The woman writing this letter echoed the habitual view of free love by stating that she found "making love without being in love" impossible, as doing so would be tantamount to "prostituting" herself. Armand seized this opportunity to outline his theses supporting revolutionary sexuality and camaraderie amoureuse that differed from the traditional views of the partisans of free love in several respects. Armand submitted that from an individualist perspective nothing was reprehensible about making "love," even if one did not have very strong feelings for one's partner. Camarades such as Raphaële were wrong to attribute excessive importance to various erotico-sexual manifestations. Biologically, after all, these acts were "entirely healthy and normal." They were therefore not to be regarded as an "exceptional or extraordinary action." Moreover, he urged "our female congeners" not to exaggerate the value they associated with "granting their favours." In particular, Armand failed to understand why a young girl with modern ideas would refuse on principle – invoking a petit-bourgeois view of sexual relations – to share the joys of love with un camarade that she merely respected or liked. Agreeing out of camaraderie to satisfy the sexual desires of others with the same ideological views seemed to him no more dishonourable than accepting an appointment as a state official. Armand continued that if he were a woman, he would feel "tremendous inner joy" if he "believed" he were "the object of desire to share amorous delights" with a friend who was "not entirely repugnant" and with whom he "sensed a common mood and spirit." The debate on camaraderie amoureuse had begun."

It is important to grasp right away what is being suggested here by Armand so that we do not get things twisted from the off. Armand's view appears to be that men and women should regard physical love as an aspect of regular relationship RATHER THAN as something done by people in a special, and in some sense different and possibly exclusive, relationship. This fact is brought out in polemic, at the same time, with another

French anarchist, Han Ryner, where he articulates the view that his opinion is as it is in order to "tear down the impenetrable partition, which, even in surroundings such as ours (i.e. anarchist ones), distinguishes amorous expressions from other manifestations of camaraderie." Such a comment warns us that Armand was moving in territory unfamiliar, and perhaps even dubious, to other, more bourgeois, anarchists. Armand made no differentiation, seemingly, between comrades of both sexes, who could have fun playing board games or eating a meal and by engaging in mutual sexual enjoyment. In fact, an anecdote the French authors of the essay I am discussing relay confirms this when someone who knew Armand suggests that it was his habit to refuse dinner invitations with the reply, "If I share your bread and your wine, I must share your bed as well!" Readers should not take this to mean that Armand was a licentious beast but that he had rewritten the sexual ethics of love and friendship in his own imagination.

Armand, in fact, seems not to have understood why people treated sex differently to other aspects of social relationship when, in his mind, it was merely another resource or kind of interaction available for mutual good. He noted with surprise, for example, that some comrades tried to differentiate between "having fun" in intellectual or economic endeavours and "having fun" with sex. As Manfredonia and Ronsin report him saying:

"I have often asked comrades who had invited friends that they knew to be 'sensual' [...] why they had not tried to find them a delight that matched their amorous disposition. I never received a satisfactory answer."

Armand then comes to regard relationships that hive off sexuality, in a completely unjustified and bourgeois way determined by socially arbitrary understandings of sexuality, as if it were something completely different and of a different order or kind, as

“a limited camaraderie, an incomplete hospitality” and says that he is “wanting no part of a welcome that [makes] me feel comfortable in all respects except sexually.” As with the ecosexuals I discussed in the previous section of this book, Armand seems perfectly serious about this. He is thinking about things in a different way to his society and, in his mind at least, in a better and more beneficial way all round.

Yet none of this, of course, is anything to do with convincing or coercing people to act against their will. As discussed elsewhere, Armand sees himself as something of a sexual educationalist and argues that sexual ethics must be taught and learned like any other. The ideal, such as there is one, is voluntary acts of love, people who have reformed or actualised themselves to the extent that they see love for themselves as a social resource that it is useful, as an aspect of mutuality, to engage in multiply or plurally (one imagines either concurrently or sequentially). The ideal, Armand's own ethic of anarchist love, is then a community of people, a concatenation of relationships, facilitated in and through voluntary acts of physical love as a matter of uncontroversial normality. Yet *camaraderie amoureuse* always remains “an act of free will” and is so by definition. We might translate that phrase “loving fellowship”, by the way, in order to articulate Armand's sense of it as a consistent means of relationship among multiple people, perhaps in some intentional community or voluntary association. (Armand himself tried to start a few of these for the purposes set out but numbers were small and he failed to attract any significant number of women entirely.) Armand's view is, thus, that no “healthy, normal” adult really has reason to refuse such a relational understanding, that there is no real legitimate reason (outside the dictates of one's bad bourgeois education in society) to do so, and that the pleasure derived from it is mutually beneficial in any case - just like most other activities carried out socially with one's comrades and associates (about which they would usually have no complaint at all).

In this, Armand seems to have thought that he was just being consistent with anarchy rather than bending anarchy, in the matter of love, to more mainstream, liberal, bourgeois standards. This, in fact, is often the case and people in general (at least in the West) seem to treat love and sex as if it were wholly other in regard to almost any other subject. Nothing, as Emma Goldman said of her own history of public speaking, seems to upset and outrage people more than the amorous. Whole politics, in fact, seem orchestrated around the control of it - as we are seeing unfold, yet again, in the modern United States where a religious and puritanical ideology has always existed, coming over, as it did, from the Europe of 400 years ago. Armand's novelty, in this respect, is to try and use the proto-anarchist, associationist and contractualist notions of Charles Fourier and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon to regulate love on a more "free will" basis which resulted in social benefits as well as personal ones. As Manfredonia and Ronsin report this:

"Armand aimed to show that camaraderie amoureuse was simply the implementation in the specific area of sexual-affective relations of the contractual and associationist ideas he had elaborated in 1923 in his principal theoretical text 'L'Initiation individualiste anarchiste'. He envisaged camaraderie amoureuse in the same context as other types of camaraderie between anarchist individualists: a voluntary association in which the constituents have agreed tacitly "to spare each other any avoidable suffering." In keeping with his theses on the practice of providing guarantees, this interpretation of camaraderie amoureuse is an additional means for individualists, subject to constant "worries, (...) abuses, (...) assaults, and (...) persecutions from the 'archists' (who, as everybody knows, are the opposite of the anarchists), to protect, aid, and comfort each other.

"The camaraderie amoureuse thesis," he explained, "entails a free contract of association (that may be annulled without notice, following prior agreement) reached between

anarchist individualists of different genders, adhering to the necessary standards of sexual hygiene, with a view toward protecting the other parties to the contract from certain risks of the amorous experience, such as rejection, rupture, exclusivism, possessiveness, unicity, coquetry, whims, indifference, flirtatiousness, disregard for others, and prostitution."

Armand's intentions are clearly noble and virtuous and aimed at creating both loving communities and relationships. But one may critique the "contractual" basis of this whilst recognising the good in the general idea. One, it seems to me, cannot make a contract about love - whether that is a marriage contract or Armand's more avant-garde sex contracts. One has to leave people to their freedoms which may come and go as they will (the pirate example). One has to trust to the ethics of mutuality and reciprocity which anarchists have otherwise well established politically and economically. One may well recognise Charles Fourier's belief in a "universal right to enjoyment" (and so to pleasure) but it is a matter of anarchy to allow the details of that to be worked out in real time by actual people in and through the moments, and moods, of their lives. That is the ethos of agency, autonomy and voluntary association. Armand (who, to be honest, was hardly handsome - but then neither am I) is concerned that only the apparently "sexy" people would benefit from this revolutionary understanding of love and is concerned that it become a general ethos. But that can only occur by leaving people free to choose it for themselves. The gerrymandering of society is not the anarchist way and it can never be the anarchist way lest anarchy lose what makes it anarchy. Armand sees in his thesis, which he sometimes calls "sexual amoralism", as an opponent of the currently normative sexual moralism, a means to overcoming several social ills. He writes:

"sexual amoralism destroys in human unity values of servitude, such as vice, virtue, purity, chastity, reserve, caution, fidelity, and many other attributes that necessitate the state or

the church as guardians or teachers of morals. Wherever amorality figures in sexual relations, people who uphold moral traditions and good values are no longer required. That is what makes the sexuality we propagate revolutionary... As individualists, we should explore a conception of inter-sexual relations that makes us more anarchist, more 'neither gods nor masters,' more ex-morality, more ex-legality, more ex-sociability – but also more sociable when we form associations."

Armand combines these theses he is positively supporting himself with regular attacks on the traditional family as a malign, controlling and destructive institution (no complaints from me here) and the socially prevalent sexual prejudices (such as permanent, single and heterosexual partners FOR LIFE) which he sees as socially dangerous and which even otherwise avowed "libertarians" sometimes share. In this, most of all, he insisted on anarchist consistency, something often wholly lacking in matters of love - as the cases of America Scarfo and Becky Edelsohn (which I discussed in *Black Dog* and which, in both cases, involve teen girls willingly engaging with older men without any evidenced displeasure or negative consequence) have shown before. Even in more recent books I have mentioned attempts to smear an otherwise seemingly passive and benign anarchist, the bookish Hakim Bey, when he even so much as strayed near ideas of taboo sexuality.

Armand, who has been so totally marginalised by modern authoritarian "anarchists" that he is largely unknown (like Scarfo and Edelsohn, in fact), did much more than that, however. Armand actively argued, without shame, that people with taboo sexual interests should be actively allowed to seek out compatible partners for their taboo activities (which, arbitrary morality aside, are "beyond good and evil") so that every genuine and apparent passion may be satiated without moral or ethical disturbance. This, he imagined, is the anarchist way of responsible liberty as opposed to the way of general moral rules,

arbitrary, authoritarian policing of sexual behaviour and intrusive morality which imposes upon the autonomy of others in their free associations. His is not a sexual ethic which would be well suited to police and the sexual police would hate his ethic of mutually satisfying sexual freedom. Armand, in fact, argues, that people should actively form voluntary associations, groups of people who may practice amorous camaraderie to their mutual benefit in a way that is nothing to do with those outside. These, in Armand's anarchist reasoning, might even be incestuous groups since, if people freely choose their sexual engagements for reasons of mutual pleasure, then moral rules must bow to this greater rule. Mutually actualised pleasure production is its own law.

Armand's sexual thesis here is in the service of his egoist theory of anarchy which is that there is no "revolution" to wait for save the one we make right now, in and through our own lives, for ourselves. His amorous camaraderie was an aspect of this very revolution and so a demonstration that, to change the world, we must fundamentally change the way we relate. In that, he has been of fundamental importance to my own anarchist self-actualisation. Quite frankly, in a post-Armand world, it seems obvious to me that if we want to change this world of exploitation then we must change from relations of domination, coercion and control to relations of activated and actualised love. In this, I side with Armand and Goldman and think that this is a vital issue, and not with Kropotkin, who did not. A prudish society is a controlled and exploited society. A voluntarily promiscuous one would not be. A freedom that is personal and political must, as of first importance, also be a freedom in love. "Promiscuity in all things" is the anarchist's creed in my opinion. But nowhere is this more important than in love. As Armand himself in fact elsewhere writes:

"it is insane to try to reduce love to an equation or to limit it to one form of expression. Those who attempt this will find right away that they've been walking the wrong road. The amorous experience knows no borders, no limits. It varies from individual to individual."

The anarchist thesis in regard to love is then simplicity itself: let it proliferate.

"To slave-love, the only kind of love that authoritarian societies can tolerate, the anarchist individualist opposes free love. To sexual dependency, that is, to the dominant concept demanding that the woman be mostly nothing but pleasure-meat, the individualist opposes sexual freedom, in other words, the freedom for every individual, of both sexes, to have their sexual life under their own control, to determine it according to their desires and the aspirations of their sensual or sentimental temperament."

On the matter of "sexual education" Armand writes (when talking about "the amorous experience" he is referring to his thesis of "amorous camaraderie" such as I have been discussing):

"We believe that the truly advanced spirits of an age are the emancipators of that age, and that they should concern themselves with becoming educated by the best sex-educators available; they should never let a chance to propagate and affirm the importance of sexual education go by. A human being should know not only what delights — sentimental, emotional, physical — are reserved for us by sexual life, but also what responsibilities it implies. A serious sexual education would not ignore the problem of making procreation voluntary, nor would it ignore the thesis that "it is the woman's choice when she will conceive." Or even that "extreme" opinion that "society should allow women to choose to abort her children or to give them over to the collective for them to raise them." It would

also treat the subject of prophylactics and other precautions one should take to avoid the fearsome effects of venereal disease. The propaganda of the freedom of love is indispensable for bringing each individual to serious reflection about the negative effects of these diseases, to consciousness of their symptoms, information too often left to mystery or treated too lightly.

The individualists do not separate "freedom of sexual life" from "sexual education". And it is important that those that know teach those that don't. It is an elementary responsibility.

Contrary to the prejudices of a religious or civil order, the individualists consider the question of sexual relations in the same way as they would treat any question. They do not exclude sexual voluptuousness from the experience of life as a whole: they place it on the same level as intellectual (artistic, literary, etc.), or even moral, or economic voluptuousness. When the individualist anarchists demand freedom of sexual life — in all circumstances, inside as well as outside of marriage — they do not pronounce themselves to be in favour of nor against monogamy or polyamory. To dogmatically support the one or the other is equally anti-individualist.

The individualists ask that the amorous experience not be qualified as more or less legitimate, as superior or inferior, whether it be simple or plural. They demand that all beings instruct themselves on all these things, and that neither fathers, mothers, nor fellows take advantage of their privileged situation to keep them hidden from those who trust them and place their confidence (by the familial obligation or otherwise) in them. To each person belongs the right to determine his or her sexual life as it pleases them, to vary their experiences or to remain with a single partner; in other words 'to do as they please'...

Sentimental emancipation consists, from our point of view, not in negating, inferiorizing, or devaluing feelings, but in putting them where they belong — on the physical, physiological plane. In all walks of life there are people inclined, instead, to put their feelings (their sexual or amorous sympathies) on a metaphysical plane. Conveniently, the individualist has been emancipated from this illusion. Feelings, sentiments, are experienced perceptions, those perceptions that the self, in the presence of other not-I beings — the intuitive and sentimental self, the sexual self if you please — The sentimental impression that one or various not-“I”s produce might be more or less impulsive, alive, powerful, marked, durable: this impression is not rustic nor inexplicable; it can be perfectly well elucidated, reasoned, analyzed. It is a manifestation of the senses like the rest; it is not more nor less moral — it is, simply, “beyond good and evil.”

Sentiment is of an individual nature, but it is susceptible to education, to conversation, to intensive and extensive acculturation, like everything that is part of the domain of the senses, everything that pushes sensibility forth. One might wish to be more sentimental than one is, and this can be achieved, in the same way as one can come, through the appropriate care, to make a tree or the land produce more beautiful fruits, or larger thorns. One can, by looking carefully, learn to be a good lover, to be tender, affectionate, caring, as one can learn to be a sailor or a speaker of a foreign language. It is certainly a question of temperament, but it is also a question of will; of reflection, of the search for personal tastes.

Thus, from the sentimental point of view, everything is liberated that makes sentiments fall into place, into the manifestations of individual sensibility, between the products of the personality’s vital constitution. Everything, sentimentally speaking, is liberated that

considers feelings to be a susceptible product — like all the products of human sensibility — of development, intensification, improvement, or vice versa...

"It's not that I want the death of love, but rather I am afraid of dead love. To this I oppose living love, which breaks the chains of prejudice, tears off the masks of pride, and leaves disdainfully; that love which is above good and evil, unbridled love, flowing and unhindered, drunken, aphrodisiac love, equal and plural, generous love that no one denies. I oppose it to the pallid, coarse, limited, scarce, prudish love, ignorant of passion and adventure, that is glued to the love for one person alone like a snail is glued to its shell, a stingy love that does not give itself because it can offer so little."

It might be noted, as a closing to all this, that Armand also developed a noted, an argued, penchant for what he called "revolutionary nudism" as an accompaniment to his views about love. He saw no reason, equally, why comrades should not be amorously nude in front of each other either, reasoning that the modern desire for clothes is obligated prudery orchestrated on the basis of arbitrary human relations. There is, in his mind, nothing shameful about any human body and so, practicality aside, no reason to find in nudity any source of shame. He added to this view the further point that nudity is a great leveller which often cuts across the clothed means of designating rank. In nudity, everybody (and every body) is equal. Thus:

"To practice 'amorous camaraderie' means, for me, to be a more intimate comrade, a more complete, and closer one. And by the mere act of being connected through the practice of amorous camaraderie to your lover, you will be, for me, a closer, more alter ego, more loved comrade."

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Black seeds of transformation

Black seeds of wild anarchy

Who will sow the black seeds

Imagining survival

In this Wasteland?

Plant the black seeds

Of cooperative promiscuity

In communities of desire

Make sex into politics

Creating relations of affluence

Unlearn the logic of agriculture

Forget the reason of property

Love grows wild

Where it will

Autonomous shoots of self-actualising affinity

Like a wilderness

Will it grow

Self-organising life

Teeming with its own connections

In mutuality

Nothing grows alone

No seed survives by itself

But by life-giving relations
And desiring connections
Life begets life

Erotic life intertwines
Intimacy abounds
Resources overflow
When love and care
Become physical realities

Black seeds creating
Life in the void;
From nothing
Comes something;
Intimate association finds a way

The principle of life
Is love meeting love
The solitary learns
Mutuality
Is life-enabling

One seed is never for itself alone
But, being planted,
It seeks out others
And joins with them

Cooperating amorously

A forest

Is an orgy of life

In which every participant

Has the instinct

To create relational wealth

Creation comes

From copulation

A common concern

To indulge desire

For pleasure

Together

You find the magic

Which escapes

The dogmatic

Authoritarian

Black seeds of transformation

Black seeds of wild anarchy and free spirits

Sow the black seeds Imagining survival

Growing a wealth of love

In this Wasteland

